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НЕ ТИАТ
OVERCOME THY

By

FANNY AIKIN-KORTRIGHT

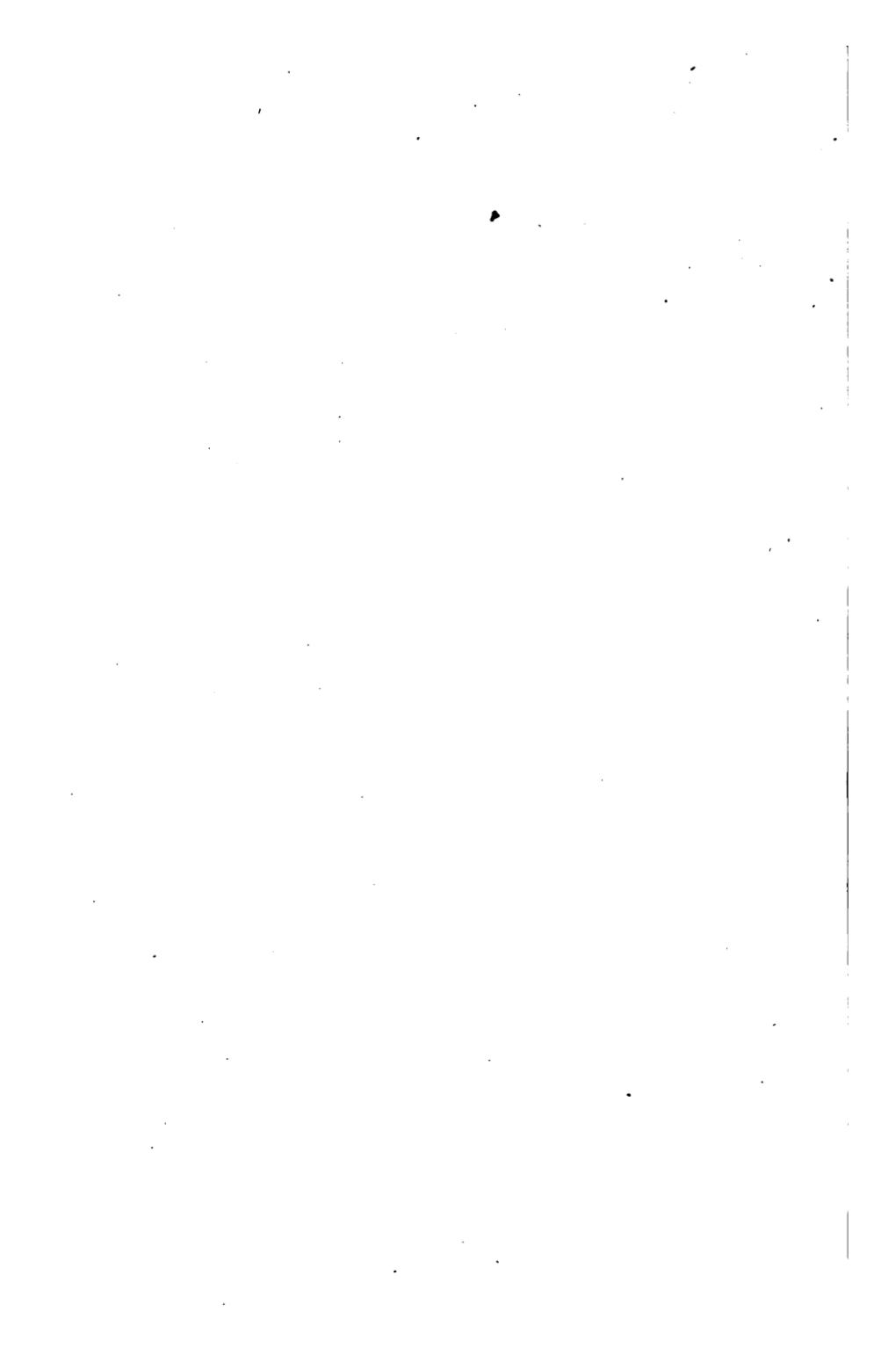




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HE THAT OVERCOMETH.

A Nobel.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

FANNY AIKIN-KORTRIGHT.

Author of "Anne Sherwood;" "The Dean: or, The Popular Preacher;"
"Waiting for the Verdict;" "The Old, Old Story;" "Pro Aris et
Focis;" "A Little Lower than the Angels;" &c.



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HE THAT OVERCOMETH.

CHAPTER I.

HOW RACHEL LIVED HER NEW LIFE AND HOW
HER DREAMS WERE BROKEN.

WARBURTON ELMORE and I became friends ere long, with so closely knit a friendship that, on my side at least, it seemed the twin of love. By degrees I lost some of my awe of him, and ventured to ask questions, and even to hazard an opinion, to which he always listened patiently and replied with indulgence. Twelve months we passed in this close intimacy, scarcely broken for a day. It would have been strange if I had been so much in the society of a mentally

superior man, and not grown larger in heart and brain.

I think I learnt much from him ; the world, the very universe, seemed to grow larger by the visions which he opened to me. Those were glorious days, in which Elmore showed to me beautiful pictures and read to me enchanting poems, and gilded the commonest things of life by his brilliant imagination.

I wondered at his goodness, his generosity, in sacrificing so much of his precious time to me, to poor little insignificant me, who had hitherto walked through life quite unnoticed.

Perhaps it was compassion of my lonely lot which drew him towards me.

Perhaps it was curiosity to read a rustic heart and head which had never before held converse with any but simple people. Perhaps the man of genius was *blasé*, and wanted something fresh and untried, or, satiated with the admiration he had received, he wanted fresh incense.

Ah ! how selfish I grew in my new dreamland,

Happiness is always selfish, except the happiness of saints and angels.

Poor dear Alice wrote frequent and long letters ; she besought me to come, despite Warford gossip ; she could not do without me, and all was going wrong in her little household. She told me all her troubles, from baby's last convulsion, and Guy's occasional frown at unpunctual, ill-prepared dinners, down to the broken crockery of a careless servant. "Oh, if sister Rachel would but come back. Alice had heard that Julia was going down to Warford. She would take Guy from her, she knew she would. If I would only go down to her help, I should put everything right. Guy did not love her now, he stayed so late at that horrid office, and when he came home he lay on the sofa with closed eyes, and neither talked to her, nor looked at her ; so little was he like the Guy of old times, whom she had loved so dearly,—etc., etc., etc."

Sometimes Alice's letters moved me to tears, sometimes moved me, for a time, to return to

Warford ; but I put off the time, lingering on in what seemed my fool's paradise.

I was conscious of my selfishness, but quieted my conscience with the thought that I could contribute to my friend's comfort, without hurting Guy's pride, by sending gifts to Alice ; this I did, therefore, and thus helped to keep up the falling roof tree.

Meanwhile, I considered that I was improving, and storing my mind.

Elmore was teaching me a thousand things of which I had only dreamed previously. It was he who taught me that London was not merely an assemblage of wealth and poverty, of palaces and garrets, of princes and beggars, of the privileged and the parias of society ; not the dull city alone, with a sluggish, slimy river, and a canopy of smoke. He found in it, and showed me a thousand beautiful and interesting spots and objects. He read to me divine songs, and led me to dream near the ashes of the great men who had sung them. He took me through the rich

picture galleries of the wealthy, full of the treasures that some among them so generously share with those who are athirst for such fountains of beauty, but cannot call them their own. He lingered beside me in the aisles of the old grey abbey, till I at least could conjure up the souls of the mighty dead.

He showed me even the little common things that they take children to see when they first come to London: the curiosities in the Tower, and the wax images in Baker street, but he poetized the most common objects till they grew enchanting, and almost made me think him a true magician, such as they had told me about in olden times, by the winter fire in Warford.

All this time I knew very well I was learning to love Elmore, and that the last error would be worse than the first, in that I was no longer a girl, but a woman, whose love would be more obstinately rooted in her heart.

CHAPTER II.

A DIMMER VISION FOR RACHEL.

“JULIA is here, in this very place, in Warford. I have received a wicked anonymous letter, telling me that—well, I will not repeat it—but oh Rachel! by all your hopes of happiness, come to me! Oh, do come. I see nothing before me, before all of us, but misery and death, if you don’t help me in my loneliness and misery.

“Your affectionate,

“ALICE ROLFE.”

“P.S.—That letter is in Mrs. Belton’s handwriting, everyone says so; and I have shown it to a good many people. But it is not about you,

dear; it is all about that wicked Julia and Guy. If I thought it true, Rachel, I should, I am sure, sure I should, kill myself! Guy told me the other day that he should go mad and shoot himself. And to think that our happiness, and the sweet honeymoon, and the lovely house, with the damask silk curtains, and the beautiful dresses I had, should all come to this. Oh, Rachel! Rachel! what shall I do? Baby has had another fit, and she may grow up to have fits; do you think she will? I hope she will never, never marry.

“ALICE.”

Alice’s letter was put into my hands just as I was leaving the house to walk to Kensington Gardens with Elmore.

“ You will go in again to read your letter, Miss Arden?” said my companion. I hesitated, and wanted so much to know whether I ought to go on, or to put my unopened letter in my pocket.

“ I can wait,” said I, hesitatingly.

“ Why should you?” and he turned towards me

as I thought, trying to read my face : what did he want to discover there ?

“ Is it the letter from the brother Guy, of whom you spoke ? ”

“ No ; from his wife.”

“ His childish wife ? ”

“ I did not call her so.”

“ No ; but your face did. Only by its expression, I gathered that brother Guy married his mental inferior.”

“ Then I must have looked very unamiable.”

“ Or very frank.”

“ Yet I love Alice very dearly.”

“ But you did not always love her.”

“ Perhaps not.”

“ And there was a moment in your life when you hated her.”

“ How can you know ? ”

“ Only from your looks.”

“ Mr. Elmore, how can you interpret my looks ? ”

“ I have studied them.”

“ They were not worth the study.”

"I think differently. But your letter—"

"I will read it presently."

"Have you the patience to wait till we reach the gardens?"

He gave me his arm, and we walked on in silence till we came to a shadowy tree, and sat down under its branches. It was near where they say the labyrinth stood in the old times.

"A lovely sunset," said Elmore.

"Beautiful! But how the colours are shifting and changing; yet never quite melting into each other."

"True, Miss Arden, the wind evidently blows all ways, and drives the clouds capriciously; they are floating about like a woman's fancies."

"Are they never stable?"

"What is your experience?"

"I have had so little."

"Pardon me, you are twenty-three?"

"Yes."

"You must, ere this, have had a little world of experience in your heart."

"Even that has moved in a narrow circle."

"Indeed ! But your letter ?"

There was something strange in Elmore's manner. I knew that he was reading my face, while I opened the letter ; and that he would read the contents through the beams or shadows that would pass over my features. But when I read Alice's words, my whole soul flew away from the present, and sailed back to old Warford. I started to my feet and exclaimed,—“I must go home ! I must go to Guy and Alice ! I must go directly.”

“Look at the sunset,” said Elmore, provokingly. “Can you guess what colour will be in the ascendant next ?”

“No.”

“I can though ; it will be purple above just because it hung lowest in the horizon ; and gold was at the top. Let us call these two colours brother Guy and friend Elmore. Elmore had reached the cloudy hill-top a minute ago ; now brother Guy has distanced him ! I lose you then !

Well, I am used to change and disappointment.
When do you go ?"

"Directly—to-morrow. I would go to-day
if possible."

"So let it be," said Elmore, moodily, "the
sooner it is over the better."

I knew not what he meant. We walked home
in silence, parted with scarce a word ; but I
heard him for a long while afterwards pacing his
room. He had spoken as if my departure would
be a great loss to him. "I lose you then." What
could these words mean ? Did he love me ? Me !
plain little rustic Rachel Arden, from Warford ?
I must be in a dream. Was I to leave that dream
for a sorrowful reality ? leave Elmore, to be for-
gotten perhaps : for I had a fear that a poet must
be caught by every fresh object that passed by
him. I suffered deeply ; though still without
knowing whether heart, or fancy felt the pang.

But a voice within seemed to impel me towards
the west country ; and the very air seemed to
fling me a message from dear old Warford, like

the words that came to Paul in the olden days—
“ Come over and help us.”

I was in a cab, at the door of my lodgings, early the next morning ; my luggage was on the roof, but not all, for I had left a trunk in my room ; I scarcely knew why, myself. I had looked round with regret, even at the walls that had seemed to me so dingy but a little while before. I had received a rough embrace from Madame Seraphina, and had seen two large tears like beads, roll down her cheeks when she said farewell.

My landlady had also embraced me, and pushed a large bag of biscuits and sandwiches into my hand, and I was ready to depart. Elmore did not appear. I dared not look up to his window, yet my greatest earthly wish at that moment was to see him. Pride and shame forbade my lingering, and I departed.

Had I known the world's ways, I suppose I should have felt rather indignant—or at least hurt—at Elmore's want of courtesy in not offer-

ing me his escort to the station. I did not feel offended, but very sad, at our parting without a word of farewell. Still, I knew not whether my imagination or my heart sorrowed ; still, I knew not whether I loved this man or not.

CHAPTER III.

HOW THINGS LOOKED AT WARFORD.

"Oh, thank God, you have come!" cried Alice, hysterically, throwing herself into my arms. "Guy is not home yet, though it's eight o'clock; it's not all that horrid office, nor the stupid cases that keep him! Julia Darrel is stopping at the inn between the office and our house; I dare say he is with her, I am sure he is; but I won't reproach him, only I shall die; I am sure I shall die!"

"And little Alice?"

"Oh, she is ill; always, always ill! Guy says the food disagrees with her."

"Very likely it is that ; why not consult with Mrs. Rolfe."

"Mrs. Rolfe is in Cheltenham."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, somebody says, Mrs Belton I mean, says, that rats always run from a falling house ; she knows that all is going on wrong at the office ; she has her money settled on herself, so she has gone away for change of air till the storm has blown over, and she has a comfortable home again."

"A home?"

"They have been obliged to give up their house, and poor Mr. Rolfe has gone into lodgings. Guy said he should have made him come home to us, only our house is so wretchedly uncomfortable ; but how can I help that, Rachel ?"

How indeed could poor Alice help it ? she whose only education had been to look like a pretty doll, and to smile. The room in which she received me was very untidy and comfortless ; I looked round in vain for a clean spot on which

the eye might repose. Alice herself was utterly neglected in appearance ; a few years of marriage had changed her sadly ; she seemed to have given up all effort to look pleasant in attire, and her hair was pushed behind her ears in rough disorder.

Little Alice had a feverish cough. She was playing with the ruins of a Noah's ark, and, mingled with maimed and halt creatures, were some of her mother's trinkets. Alice had inherited prettiness, but not even childhood's beauty could quite pierce through the wretched mask of dirt on the little face.

A knock at the door—a sharp, impatient knock. I should never have known it for Guy's, but Alice did, and changed colour. She was growing afraid of the husband she still fondly loved.

Guy greeted me kindly, but I immediately saw that there was something unusual in his manner ; that something was not wholly the pressure of circumstances.

Alice hung about him, with her old, child-like

affectionate way, but he rather bore with than returned her caresses. He soon began to question me of myself, but there was an absent look in his eye, while he turned round sharply to Alice, "Have you given Rachel some tea?"

"No, dear, but I'm so sorry! I told Anne to keep the fire in; I dare say she has."

Alice rushed out to arrange matters. Then said Guy, hurriedly, "Rachel, you have great influence with that poor child." I looked inquiringly. "Alice, I mean," he continued; "talk to her, I beseech you; try and make her more reasonable. You know that Mrs. Cheveley is here?"

"Well, Guy?"

"I have been obliged to see her several times, more professionally than otherwise. She has placed her affairs all in my hands. God knows we can't afford to send one client away," and while Guy spoke he looked utterly wretched. "Alice is driving herself and me mad with her jealousy. She is not cross, though, poor

girl, but always fainting, or in tears, and looks the reproach she is too tender-hearted to speak. What can I do, Rachel?"

"May I speak frankly, Guy?"

"Certainly, you are my oldest friend, say what you will."

"Then I think poor Alice has some foundation for her jealousy."

Guy started, and grew white and red alternately.

"Do you think me cruel and dishonourable, Rachel?"

"No, only weak and impressionable."

"Rachel, I have forgiven Julia; it was a Christian duty."

"It was; but—"

"But what?"

"Intercourse with her will be dangerous, not only to your wife's peace, but to your honour. You rely too much on your own strength, Guy. You loved Julia too well; she is a beautiful woman, and—"

“She is beautiful,” repeated Guy.

“And artful too,” I added.

“Rachel, you are prejudiced.”

“No, clear-sighted. Surely, Guy, the past speaks her character.”

“She was forced into that hateful marriage; she has explained it all, and besought my forgiveness with tears.”

“Oh, Guy! Friend, brother, beware! Had Julia one womanly feeling left, one repentant thought, she would never have seen your face again, to disturb your peace.”

“Nature is nature,” said Guy, “she loved me once.”

“Never, never,” I repeated.

“Rachel, forgive me, let us drop this subject; you are a person of too cool and reflective a character to judge any one of warmer feelings. While you reflect, the passionate heart throbs into action. We cannot all be sober.”

“But we can all be honourable, Guy.”

"That, I trust, I shall always be," said Guy, proudly, and just then Alice entered.

"So fortunate, dear, Anne really kept the fire in, and the water boiling. I have made the tea. I told Anne to boil an egg, and we had three, but between us we have broken them. I have sent for more."

The light fell more fully on Alice's face than I had yet seen it, I was startled. There was, of course, the same pretty features as ever, but every ray of expression seemed to have faded from them. She was growing fatter, and the general effect was that of a full, round baby, not yet awakened to intelligence. The sight gave me a pang; there could be no hope of success for Alice in competing with Julia; the blankness of that childish face was appalling. Guy followed the direction of my eye; perhaps he shared my thoughts. He began pacing the room; presently he stopped by the child, who was sitting on the carpet, playing with a slender gold chain.

"Give me that, Alice," said the young father, stooping over the child.

"Shan't," said the little one, putting up her shoulder.

"I must teach you the meaning of must," said Guy, unfastening the baby's grasp of the trinket. Guy was not ungentle in the action, but little Alice gave a fearful scream.

"Oh, Guy, don't make her cry!" exclaimed the mother, imploringly, "she has been so cross all day. I dare say it's teeth; do you think it too late for teeth, Rachel?"

"Teeth! nonsense!" said Guy, "why is not the poor child in bed? Do you know it is nearly nine o'clock, Alice?"

"Indeed I do know it!" said Alice, shaking her head dolefully. She shall go, if you like, but I'm afraid she won't."

Which proved very true, for baby Alice would not, and at last Guy carried his little daughter up stairs himself, she kicking and screaming in mimic rage. Alice told me, when her husband

had left the room, that she had tried everything with the child—whipping and scolding, coaxing and bribing, but all to no purpose. “Nothing will move her ; she’s as determined as Guy, Rachel, and you don’t know how determined he is. Promise me that if he tells you anything of Julia Darrel, you’ll tell me.”

“No one can tell more than we know,” I answered. “She is a vain, cold-hearted, selfish woman, but she will not be long here. Warford is too dull a place to hold so gay a butterfly. Don’t fear, Alice, Guy is but her lawyer, and a lawyer, you know, like a doctor, must go wherever he is summoned. But let us return to home matters ; you promised me some tea.”

“True, I had forgotten it. Oh, Rachel dear, how selfish you will think me !”

“No, indeed. I know you have graver cares than even feeding a hungry traveller.”

“Promise me one thing,” said Alice, “promise me that you won’t leave Warford again while that Mrs. Cheveley is here.”

I gave the required promise, I fear, without much thought.

The dirty little servant brought in the tea ; by this time Guy had returned.

"That egg is hard, Rachel," said he.

"Never mind, I like hard eggs."

"I thought you would, dear," said Alice, "but I wonder how that one should be hard, for I know it did not boil above eight minutes!"

Then poor Alice began to recite a whole litany of sorrowful complaints, from lost button-hooks upwards.

Guy tried to talk to me of what I had seen and heard in London, of places of interest and books ; but Alice, who cared for none of these things, interrupted, to question me of the fashions, of which she heard, with a sigh of the deepest regret, that she could not follow them. She wondered much that my appearance was so little modified by a year in London. "How did they wear the bonnets now ? were the strings broad or narrow ? were they trimmed with lace

or flowers? Did they wear flowers? how many? what kind? Were the flowers in Burlington Arcade really so beautiful?" And as she spoke, her eyes sparkled, and young life came back into her face. Imagination transplanted her into the midst of beautiful millinery, and she felt as I should feel, lost in the mazes of an exquisite poet, or wandering with an almost bewildered delight among statues and pictures.

Guy looked at Alice and smiled; he crossed the room and kissed her tenderly.

"Alice, I would give you all these pretty things, if I could."

"But you can't, Guy, you know you can't," and Alice burst into tears.

CHAPTER IV.

A LITTLE LIGHT IN THE STORM.

At last I rose to depart. "Where are you going, Rachel?" said Guy.

"To the inn," said I, "my luggage is at the station; it seems strange to say so in Warford, Guy!"

"Strange, indeed!" said Guy. "We have a spare room—if—"

"Oh, do stay, Rachel; stay, pray!" cried Alice, beseechingly. "The sheets arn't aired, and now I'm sure the fire is out, but we can manage some way."

"No," said Guy, "we won't urge you to stay in discomfort, it would be asking too much."

"No, no, stay!" said Alice, "I'll see about your bed directly ; but oh dear ! oh dear ! where are those keys ? I never can keep my keys."

Guy took up his hat. "I will see you to the inn, Rachel." I looked at his face to see if he really wished me gone, or if he only felt embarrassed at his disorderly and uncomfortable house. I soon saw that the last was the moving cause. "No, Guy," I answered, "I won't go to the inn ; I am tired, I must stay here. You will see it will all come right ; we shall manage very well." Thus I became the guest of Guy, which I had all but vowed never again to be. But Warford would leave me in peace ; probably it had now fairer game, in Julia.

The next day rose bright and clear, and when I looked out upon the sunshine, I felt that I was still young.

Alice was early at my bedside, in her dressing-gown and night-cap. "Guy is gone," she said, "Come down just as you are, and we can have a long talk."

I obeyed, and descended, finding that in the eye of day every thing looked worse than the preceding night. I could well understand why, setting aside all Julia's alluring wiles Guy often delayed to return to his comfortless home. Yet Alice loved him ; she was never angry, nor sullen ; but love such as that was not enough to enchain a man to his wife's side. I understood how his impatient spirit chafed at the stream of nonsense flowing from Alice's lips. I felt at moments that not for worlds could I have tied myself for aye to such companionship. Guy would have been a better and a happier man without Alice. Alice a gay, floating butterfly still, if she had not linked her fate with Guy's. But what could undo the past ? and how helpless the case seemed now ! Alice was very young it is true, and while the light of morning lasts, one may hope it is not too late to learn and labour ; but the poor girl was at once wanting in intelligence and will. Still I resolved to try if I could help her to help herself.

Alice was not one of those contrary natures who will not act themselves, nor let another act. She had the merit of docility in a great degree. She was delighted when I offered to relieve her for a week or two from the housekeeping, and begged to be endowed with absolute power, speaking half in earnest, half in jest.

"Everything, and anything!" exclaimed Alice.

"First of all, then," said I, "write a note to Guy; tell him that you will dine punctually at six, and ask him to bring his father home to dinner."

"But Mr. Rolfe never does come to dinner."

"Never mind, Alice; ask him now."

"But we can't make him comfortable."

"Yes we can; do write, Alice."

"Presently, dear."

"No, now; and tell Guy to be home early."

"How can I send a note down?"

"I'll find the way, write!"

She wrote. I found a messenger in a news-

paper boy, and sent him also for my luggage, which soon arrived.

The great point now was to occupy the two Alices, that business might not be interrupted. I hit on a scheme for amusing both. To the little one I gave some indestructable toys which I had brought from the great city ; to the bigger child my keys, asking her to look over my trunks, and examine my new purchases.

I passed a busy, pleasant day—a pleasanter one than I had known for long : aye even more so than the days I had spent dreaming beside Elmore. They had been selfish, now I was working for others. When five o'clock came, I looked round with some satisfaction. By the help of a charwoman, summoned in haste, and by bribing the little maiden to exertion, by promises, I had reduced several of the dirty rooms to cleanliness and order, and had nearly cooked a plain dinner

Little Alice submitted wonderfully well to me, when she saw I would be obeyed ; she even consented to being washed and dressed.

The other Alice I had not seen for hours. I went in haste to find her, that I might act as lady's maid to what I meant to be the central figure of a pleasant picture. If Guy was to be saved from Julia—saved for honour and happiness—it must be through rendering his wife as attractive, and his home as pleasant as possible. Strange was the scene that greeted my eyes when I entered the ill-kept room of which I had taken possession the night before. The contents of my trunks were scattered in confusion over bed and floor and table ; while Alice, attired in a delicate-spotted muslin dress, with a blue sash, was lying sleeping on the sofa, a bright smile parted her red lips, as if a happy dream bound her in a spell. She actually did not look seventeen, as she there lay sleeping.

Presently she started up with an expression of pain and disappointment. “ And it was all a dream then ! but so sweet, so lovely ! I dreamed I was choosing my wedding clothes, and Guy was with me. Oh, Rachel dear, is that you ? I

knew you wouldn't mind it, so I have been trying your beautiful dress on ; it made me think so of one I had, just before I was married, only the spots on that were bigger. You don't mind my trying it on, do you ?"

"Mind it, Alice ! I brought that dress from London for you."

"For me ? You dear, good, sweet darling !" and she flung her arms round me, in an ecstasy of delight. I smoothed her hair, and tied it round with a blue ribbon.

Just as I had completed my task, Guy's knock was heard. "Go, Alice," said I, pushing the pretty, girlish figure forward. "Go to meet your husband ; you look so nice. Go, and tell him dinner is ready."

CHAPTER V.

CUTTING WISDOM TEETH.

Guy's gloomy brow cleared, as Alice met him, smiling and flushed with pleasure and excitement. The pretty new dress made her forget all her woes—even Julia, and her own frantic jealousy.

The house looked pleasant and cheerful. Guy gave a deep sigh of relief, as he led his father into the room where the table was nicely prepared for dinner.

“A fairy has been at work here,” said Guy ; “indeed I think I met one at the door, or the god-child of one ; the fairy god-mother is surely near.”

“She is a brownie, then !” said I laughing,

as I turned round to greet Mr. Rolfe ; "poor Mr. Rolfe," as every body now called him. Never was man so altered. No one could have recognized in him the cold, stiff, haughty and repellent man of old times, repellent even to his own child. The coldness and stiffness had given place to a nervous, tremulous manner. The haughty, repulsive look had changed to a sort of wistful gaze, unconsciously asking for sympathy. Never had so brief a space of time wrought such a melancholy change in any one. Mr. Rolfe was a bent, white-haired old man, prematurely.

But there had sprung up a close bond beyond that of father and son, between the two men : it was evident that the elder leant on the younger, and looked to him for counsel and support. Strange, the wife and mother was never adverted to. I wonder what they thought of her ?—perhaps deservedly hard thoughts, that shame would not let them speak. Did she, living at ease, ever think of them ? She wrote very proper letters at

stated intervals, and inquired duly after the health of those she had left behind, and she gave descriptions of things which she saw and heard, in her new and more fashionable world. She asked no business question, but advised strict economy, and that Guy should check his wife's inordinate love of dress, etc., etc.

Poor Alice ! no one would have suspected such a passion in her, who had seen the state of her attire on my arrival. Still it was an ill-extinguished flame, whose smouldering fire might at any moment burst forth. The love of finery was a sort of intoxication in Alice ; it actually made her lose her head ; it was certainly the one ruling passion of her life, and had no counterpoise but the love she bore Guy, and even that it sometimes overmatched and overmastered.

We had a pleasant evening, after a pleasant dinner. The elder man was very silent, but he looked now and then admiringly at his daughter-in-law, and repeated two or three times, " I had no idea that you were so comfortable, my dear.

How nicely your house is kept," adding to me in a lower voice, " Guy is a lucky fellow, after all ; and what a pretty creature she is. But could she bear a reverse, think you ?"

" She loves Guy," was all I could answer.

" Then it will be well with him, whatever happens," he added ; " love lightens all loads."

Poor man ! he spoke of love, as the famished talk of food.

Little Alice was particularly good that evening. She stood in awe of me, and dared not indulge in her usual tempers. Again Mr. Rolfe commended the young mother, " the child was so well behaved ; no doubt that when she was cross it was from illness."

" Yes ; from teething," answered the mother.

" At which Guy gave a melancholy smile, and asked, " when people usually ceased teething, did it go on indefinitely ?"

Mr. Rolfe answered in all seriousness, that he " believed there was no fixed age for cutting

wisdom teeth." Then he complimented Alice on the pudding, "Did she make it?"

"She had had some help;" and she smiled and blushed as she spoke; while Guy sighed, for he knew she was lying. Still he said nothing; for he would not mar the old man's unusually cheerful hour by a painful subject, nor would he make Alice blush before us both.

Presently Mr. Rolfe returned to the theme of the comfort he saw around him; he was evidently contrasting it with his own, perhaps cheerless dwelling, in solitary lodgings.

Guy looked at Alice—only looked at her; and the soft-hearted girl went straight up to the old man, laid her hand on his arm, and said kindly,—

"You like little Alice, and you like our puddings, grandpapa; come home to us, and Guy will be so happy—so very happy."

"Yes, father; come home," said Guy, "we will do our best for you." He laid one hand on Mr. Rolfe's shoulder, and the other on Alice's shin-

ing curls, as if to bless her for the kind thought that had risen in her heart. Then he drew his wife nearer to him, and kissed her tenderly.

Mr. Rolfe looked up at Alice, then at Guy ; his lips quivered, a tear trembled on his eyelid, he could not speak. I believe they forgot my presence ; I hope they did. I hoped, too, that they forgot for the minute that there were heavy cares and anxieties to meet them with the sunrise.

Mr. Rolfe was leaning back in an easy chair ; Guy was beside him, holding one nerveless hand in his ; while Alice sat on a low stool at her husband's feet, alternately looking up in his face, and laying her head upon his knee.

It was a happy home picture, if it could only have endured ; still prettier was it when the little child drew near, took her grandfather's second hand in hers, and stroked it fondly.

No ; they did not see me : for there was a mist of tears in every eye. I slipped away to talk with my confederate the charwoman, to bribe her with extra pay to work an extra hour, and to lay

plans for an active campaign to begin on the following Monday ; for this was Saturday night. I stayed out of the way till tea was on the table ; and after that just long enough to prevent Alice putting the executive office on me, and thus losing ground as the central figure.

When Mr. Rolfe departed I heard him say in a low tone to Guy,—“ It must come ! It must come, sooner or later.”

“ Yes ; it must come, father,” repeated Guy ; “ let us go forth to meet it boldly : one manly plunge, and the worst will be over.”

“ True, my son ; but I have lost all energy.”

“ Yet not your honour, dear father ! We must swim for life ; if you grow faint, I must hold you up : you shall not sink, father—you shall not sink ; neither shall the world ever point its finger at you, or me as a dishonoured man.”

CHAPTER VI.

TEMPTATION.

EVERYTHING went on smoothly for a month ; the old father came home, to Guy's great content; and took the easy chair in the corner, and the best place at table, and was helped to the best morsel on it. Everyone joined in yielding the first and best of all to him, and he seemed pleased and accepted everything in a dreamy, absent sort of way, almost as unrealities ; and every now and then he looked up with a wistful, doubting gaze, as if he would say, " Will it last ? is it not too fair to endure ? "

Yes, that was a pleasant time. Guy came home regularly, and Alice was satisfied and smiling.

I had succeeded in reducing little Alice to obedience, without any harsh discipline, and in establishing something like neatness, regularity, and order in the house. We heard and saw nothing of Julia ; only at church did she throw her shadow over our path. There she appeared each Sunday, elegantly attired, and with a countenance which, if I wrong her not, was dressed for the occasion in the semblance of plaintive melancholy.

I could see that Guy changed colour if he met her eye, even to deadly paleness, while poor Alice trembled and grasped her husband's arm with feeble tenacity.

I could see plainly that Guy had not forgotten the past, and that Julia was resolved he should not forget it. Still she never approached us.

Whether Guy saw her then occasionally, as her legal adviser I know not, but her name was never mentioned among us. One day I picked up a scrap of paper, evidently part of a torn letter, on which I saw the words, involuntarily, "by the

remembrance of our early love!" It was Julia's hand, and written with an affectation of tremulousness. God forgive me, if I am hard upon this woman, if I lay upon her one more sin than she sinned ; but I always thought that any emotion she displayed, must be an acted lie : she had no heart, no affections ; but she had passions, and I believe she now felt that species of interest in Guy, which was created by the very holy barrier between them. His love was a forbidden thing, therefore the more coveted, the more tenaciously struggled for. I saw that she had been writing a sentimental letter to Guy, and for days afterwards he was deeply depressed. He had a great sense of duty and honour, indeed the obscure young lawyer, whose little world lay in little Warford, had a great deal of the Christian gentleman in him ; I feared no absolute sin or wrong on his part, but I know he was sorely, cruelly tried and tempted, and that the pretty temptress would have neither pity nor remorse ; for the tender mercies of a vain woman are cruel.

Beside all this, there was a cloud rising in our sky, from which we tried in vain to avert our eyes ; it plainly pointed to thunder not far off, and showed that the rain would descend, and the floods come, and the now pleasant little home would be beaten to the ground in desolate ruins ; then what would become of those four lives ?— the old man, the little child, the young husband, and the child-wife ! Three very helpless beings were the father, wife, and child, and all looking up to and hanging upon that crushed, broken-spirited man, young in years, but assailed by sore trial, and yet sorer temptation.

CHAPTER VII.

IN CHURCH.

My life was so full that I had little leisure for retrospection, whatever my inclination might be; still, sometimes my mind would wander back to my poet. Mine! The thought was too ambitious, that man of fine fancy and finer feeling, of richest gifts! How vain and foolish was the thought that his lordly imagination and heart could really have stooped to me! For a moment I had cheated myself into such a belief, but it was over now, and I had nothing to complain of but my own weak folly: I could not reproach him. I was but a little stray leaf that for a moment had

floated on the river of his life ; not a deep-rooted tree, to stand firmly on its banks through long years. He had been kind and good to me, a lonely stranger, and my silly, latent vanity had translated his very kindness into an impossible love, so full of shapes is fancy ! And now it was all over, and I was a little mortified and a little sorrowful, and a little angry too, but only angry with myself. Yet I was not breaking my heart ; for this new love was quite unlike my first heart-trial, or rather I was no longer the same being I had been then. I was, if not stronger to resist, at least more able to conceal. I was resolved, moreover, to rise superior to my follies.

What was love to me, or I to love ? unless I could grow fairer in face and mind, and for that I must wait until we should sit down on the hill-tops of eternity. It was plain I was to be the old maiden aunt of the family, with that still, colourless life upon which no sunshine of earth's joys was to fall. I told my heart to be calm and

contented : it seemed to heed my voice, and its pulses grew regular and monotonous. I went through my self-appointed duties, and took a daily walk in the fields, or lanes, holding the little child by the hand. I went to worship in the old grey church, turning my eyes and mind inward and upward, as far as might be. I bent down over my prayer-book and saw nothing beside. I joined with a full heart in the plaintive hymns, and really longed in my quiet way for the silent land of the great hereafter.

But one day the even pulse was stirred. Guy, Alice, the old father, the little child, and I were at evening prayer in church. We filled one of those old fashioned square pews, of which few, if any, are left. I was between Mr. Rolfe and the younger Alice.

The white-haired preacher had given out the text, "Strangers and pilgrims," and after talking to us familiarly and gently of the strange country through which we were travelling, and

of the pains and perils of our sorrowful pilgrimage, he told us how we should cling to and support one another ; that none of us could afford to isolate himself from the pilgrim band in selfish loneliness ; but that each should feel a closely knit member of the human family, each and all striving by love to help the common brotherhood of Christ. He spoke feelingly of the sadness of enforced solitude, and dwelt on the loneliness of the heart, till God entered in and filled the vacant temple, which perhaps earthly love had made desolate. I felt my heart stirred and my eyes filled with tears : I lifted them to the face of the venerable preacher, and they met the eyes of Elmore, fixed on me with an earnest gaze, in which his whole soul seemed to come forth. I know that I blushed and trembled, and no longer heard the words of the old man. Alice and Guy, and even the little child, looked at me. I was ashamed, confused, yet happy. Ah, how little will make a human

heart happy when it has been accustomed to hunger for that bread of life—love ! Elmore had come—he had come for me ; his looks said so. Could it be ? He had missed me from his side, as one who had listened to and appreciated his beautiful thoughts.

CHAPTER VIIL

IN THE CHURCH PATH.

THE service was over, and we left the church. Elmore came up to me in the green churchyard, and silently took my hand, and silently drew it through his arm. At last I stammered out an introduction to my friends. Elmore frankly shook hands with Guy, saying in his gentlest voice, "I am already familiar with brother Guy ;" and respectfully he bowed to Alice and the old man, gazing with delighted wonder on the fair child.

Presently the path grew narrow, and the others walked in front ; Elmore and I followed. Then he bent down and whispered to me,—

"It would not do, Rachel ; I could not live

without you any longer. I have enlarged my acquaintance, and seen more of so-called society—the fair, the witty, and the learned ; but I have been lonely without you, so lonely !”

Those were pleasant words to hear, and sweet was the voice that spoke them ; but I was too much unaccustomed to happiness to hear them with an untroubled heart.

“ Speak to me, Rachel ; tell me at least you are glad to see me !”

“ I am glad, Mr. Elmore.”

“ Mr. Elmore !”

“ What can I say ?”

“ Say to me, once for all, I do not hate you, Warburton Elmore.”

“ Hate you ! No ; I like you very much.”

“ Ah ! have I come from London to hear only that ! Why are you so cold to me, Rachel ?”

“ I don’t think I am.”

“ You speak as though you feared me.”

“ Perhaps I do.”

“ Why should you ?”

"Because you are so much my superior in intellect."

"And in other things?"

"I do not feel that."

"True, Rachel, I may have a subtler fancy than you—a trick of picture-painting, which you have not; but you are above me in heart and character—truer, braver; beyond all, more unselfish: for all that, I look up to you, and honour you."

"I hope you will come home with us to supper, Mr. Elmore," said Guy, turning round and looking at both of us with interest, if not curiosity.

The narrow path had ceased, and we walked on all together. A little carriage overtook us on the road, in which Julia was seated. With unwonted benevolence she had given a seat to an elderly lady; that elderly lady turned round her face, and displayed the familiar features of Mrs. Belton. There went all Warford! What would Warford say to-morrow. Julia had fixed her eyes on the

handsome stranger; she never fixed them on any man in vain, I well knew. I began to feel a mysterious dread of her fascinations. I remembered the past more forcibly than ever; I could better understand why Alice sometimes spoke of her as "fatal."

CHAPTER IX.

ENGAGED OR NOT.

EVERYONE liked Elmore—he was so frank and genial, so entertaining too. His talents were something new to our sober people, rather frightening at first, like all untried novelties to the timid, but soon appreciated as an efflorescence of unknown, and therefore delightful regions.

He had taken lodgings for some weeks on the outskirts of our town. He said he “had come down partly to write a new poem, which he could not do in sombre, smoky London! He wanted to gather new images of beauty, by looking at green fields and a really sunny sky: moreover,

he wanted a loved friend's counsel and criticism." He said this at supper, and glanced affectionately at me ; and then coloured like a girl. I believe I looked silly ; still, I felt very proud and happy : for was I not the friend of whom he spoke ? His eyes said so, if his lips did not.

Guy was delighted with Elmore, so was the old father ; and the three men talked long and with animation, of politics, which made common ground for all—ground on which all who feel can be eloquent. The two country gentlemen were zealous Conservatives ; the poet was of course an advanced Liberal, dreaming of Utopias, and of some coming golden age of liberty, which he saw faintly on the horizon, but ready to rise as the new, splendid luminary of earth's children.

Alice listened with wonder, and without understanding a syllable, was proudly sure that her husband had the best of it. I listened with another sort of wonder ; and though the one man was my friend and the other my lover, I found myself, to my great surprise, 'criticising both !

Guy's views were narrow ; Elmore's imagination was not sufficiently balanced by reflection. His new Atlantis was a poet's dream, which could never be realized this side of the Millennium. Guy talked like a man who had had, originally, keen eyesight ; but it had become bounded by too confined a horizon. Elmore spoke like one who had been dazzled, if not made drunk with too much light. Guy had one great advantage ; in talk he was quite devoid of self-consciousness, and had no vanity. Elmore never forgot effect, and desired to captivate all his hearers, even the little child. I was clear-sighted enough to see this ; but I answered my uneasy doubts and fears with the pleasant fancy, that it was for me the poet sought to shine. Presently our guest departed. He pressed my hand affectionately, and looked rather than spoke a tender farewell.

Then there was a general, almost a solemn silence, after his departure ; it was at last broken by the words from Guy, " Sister Rachel, I con-

gratulate you.” I could not answer. “ When is it to be?” asked he.

“ What do you mean?” I stammered.

“ Now don’t pretend,” exclaimed Alice, starting up and throwing her arms round my neck. “ What are you going to wear? for I’m sure you’ve settled that.”

“ Indeed, indeed, it is all a mistake,” I stammered.

“ But you are, surely, engaged to Mr. Elmore?” said Guy, gravely.

And then it flashed painfully across my mind that, after all, Elmore had said nothing definite to me—nothing of our future. Perhaps I was only to fill one brief page of his life; and when that page was full I should be torn out, crushed, and cast aside. I might be the lay figure for one canto of a poem, then thrown down, and my place given to a fairer model. Elmore himself had told me how fugitive was a poet’s imagination; had he not told me, too, of the painter who loved his art so madly that he slew a man, in

order to paint death agonies with truth and force. I wondered whether my poet might not feel it lawful to win a woman's heart, so as to get nearer to its life-throbs, to enter into its innermost chamber, to spoil its chiefest treasures, that he might glorify his art the better by life pictures.

"Surely, you are engaged, Rachel?" persisted Guy, seeing I was silent.

"No," I answered, as deliberately as I could, "I am not engaged. I dare say you and Alice think so, Guy, because I like Mr. Elmore very much, and frankly show I do; but we are only friends."

"It is a strange friendship, then!" said Guy. "I suppose my ideas are cramped by my country education; but you and I, who have been friends all our lives, Rachel, I think—nay, I am very sure,—that our friendship never took such a turn."

"But you are not a poet, Guy!"

"True, and a 'poet is,' as the man says in the

book, ‘as much as one should say a poet’—that is, unlike any other man, and your poet, Rachel, is, I admit, very charming ; but we must see, sister, that he is something still better, ‘an honest man.’”

CHAPTER X.

TEARING A BUD OPEN.

The days passed happily enough. Elmore lingered on, writing his poem, and talking more poetry than he wrote. Warford was a new little world to him, or, rather, a new little theatre. He liked the fresh stage, and was satisfied for a long time with his rustic applauders.

We used to take long walks together, in fields, and lanes, and woods. Guy thought these rambles imprudent; and he wished to speak to Elmore, and ask his intentions, etc.; in fact, to talk to him as my nearest friend, perhaps, might reasonably talk; yet more, my trustee. I could only think of such a proceeding as painful and

humiliating—in fact, a sort of offering of oneself, so I earnestly besought Guy to forbear his purpose.

Then he begged me to relinquish my pleasant wanderings with Elmore. I could not be brought to see that they were wrong, and Guy retorted that I had been living among emancipated women.

Truly, I did not know the spring of my own actions, but I believed that I was necessary to Elmore's happiness, and it was so sweet even to seem loved. The fairy palaces, which the poet reared before the eyes of my imagination, might dissolve, like that of Aladdin ; but while it lasted how beautiful it was ! This love without words was enchantment. I could not promise to forego it ; and Guy soon again became absorbed in his own troubles and cares, and forgot me, or only now and then shook his head.

I wonder whether I loved Elmore well enough to have followed him away—far, far into the wilderness,—and to have left my little world behind for me for ever ! I know not ; but a

vague, uneasy fear arose within me, when he hinted at the chance of his going to the East. Was it the fear of losing him, or of losing all through him? Had he been my first love, I should have understood him and myself better, and never doubted whether he could be all in all to me.

Guy had promised to say no more of our romantic wanderings ; but Alice had not so promised, and suddenly exclaimed one day, “ What shall you wear at your wedding, Rachel?”

Elmore and I were bending over the same book, and discussing the author’s theories.

“ He writes only from imagination,” said Elmore, “ and has neither feeling, reason, nor experience ; his fancy alone holds the reins, and while that is the case, a flimsy fabric—a mere gauze tissue—will be—”

“ Gauze !” cried Alice, who had only just caught the last word or two, “ gauze would be preposterous for a wedding dress !”

“ A wedding dress !” exclaimed Elmore. “ Oh,

you women are all alike ; you will never let a couple of lovers live through the fairest, the most enchanting, scenes of the poem of life ; you will force one on to the catastrophe ! Now what, I beseech you, Mrs. Rolfe, what has a wedding-gown to do with our story ? ”

“ Well, I don’t know. You are so funny, Mr. Elmore ; but of course, you know, we should not like Rachel to look different to anyone else ; and gauze, why gauze is quite ridiculous for her.”

“ Rachel ! ” repeated Elmore, “ Dear me ! who proposed her wearing a gauze gown ? The one she has on is very pretty and becoming.”

“ That ! why it’s nothing in the world but a delaine. Now a delaine dress at a wedding—”

I felt nearly choking, between vexation and shame ; but I managed to gasp out, “ Dear Alice ; there is no wedding going on, except, perhaps, at the end of the book ; and, as Mr. Elmore says, we should not spoil the story by looking forward ; it is like tearing a bud open, instead of waiting for it to blow.”

"You are not going to be married yet, then?" persisted Alice.

"What would become of you and baby if I were?" asked I, trying to laugh off my confusion.

"True, we never could do without you, I am sure I couldn't. Well, I am glad you are not going to be married; at least, I mean—I mean—it's ever so much better to wait for Tom, till he comes from Australia, with plenty of money; and then we can all live together, and be so happy. And Mr. Elmore can come and see us just the same, only you won't be able to go out walking with him as you do now, because Tom might be jealous!"

"Then by all means," cried Elmore, hastily rising and throwing the book away, "let us secure the present moment of liberty, Miss Arden, and take a walk."

"Not to-day," I answered.

"Yes, now or never, it must be," said Elmore. "If you refuse to go with me to-day I leave

Warford to-night ; perhaps I had done well never to have come hither."

" Dear me ! dear me ! what is the matter," groaned Alice, " whenever I begin to talk something goes wrong ; and men are so hasty, so frightfully hasty. It's just like Guy, he tells me to be careful, but the least thing that puts him out, he's sure to let something fall ! One day when I was coming down stairs, with my hands full, I—"

I hastily snatched my hat and cloak and went out with Elmore, chiefly to stop the flood of nonsense Alice was preparing to pour forth ; but I felt indignant with him, and was full of courage to tell him something, but what ? As for that, I must trust to the inspiration of the moment. As we walked down the street, Guy came slowly up, slow in walk, stooping in gait. The full daylight falling on his face, showed most unnatural lines there ; his arms were folded, not as if in repose, but to keep down some painful throbs within ; my heart was full of pity for my child-

hood's friend. If Elmore had not been beside me, I should have questioned him. As it was, I laid my hand on his arm, and I looked the question I could not speak.

Guy shook his head, and only said, "There will be a thunder storm; don't go too far, Rachel," then he passed on.

Warburton turned to me, "There is a skeleton in every house, Rachel." I made no answer. "Mr. Rolfe, I can perceive, has a very ugly one in his; an amiable fool for a wife!" I would have interrupted him but he would not let me. "And yet this man preferred her to you!"

"Mr. Elmore!"

"You know you loved him," continued Elmore. "You cannot, cannot deny it to me, Rachel."

I opened my lips to speak, perhaps bitter reproach would have followed, but I remembered that I had given him some right to speak thus to me, by permitting such close familiar companionship between him and myself.

"Yes, you loved him ; and though I acknowledge him to be a good sort of fellow, there are times when I hate him, for that very impalpable past, of which, perhaps, he is unconscious."

It was a sore pain to hear one's past follies talked of; almost a dreadful thing, to have this man always beside me, who seemed to see my soul, even in times for ever past; myself that had been. I had thought all those years for ever buried, I had ceased to look upon the face of my dead; and the cere-clothes of the grave had long been wound around them. The thought returned to me that the poet was making of me his lay figure; and between anger and sorrow I said to him, "How dare you talk thus to me, Mr. Elmore? how dare you imagine a history in my past life, of which you know nothing?"

"How dare I? Because love dares all things; because it is no more to be bounded by cold restraints and worldly manners, than the ocean can be tied up with a cord! Mark me, Rachel; scolding words can curb a man's passion as little

as the puny despot's whip cords punished the sea. Rachel! Rachel! there are moments when love and hate look—feel—like twin brothers."

We passed out of the little street into a lane. My heart beat with something like fear, but I tried to speak quietly.

"Mr. Elmore, I no longer know you; we have been friends, and I have valued your friendship, but—"

"By heaven you will drive me mad, Rachel!" cried Elmore vehemently, and he stood still, clenching his hand as if in great wrath. "You know I love you madly, and you talk to me as if I were the acquaintance of an hour, presuming on a polite reception. Who is this fellow of whom Mrs. Rolfe speaks?"

"Her brother."

"Well?"

"That is all."

"It is not all; what is he to you? I will know."

"You have no right to question me."

"I have the right. I love you: you have tacitly accepted my love; at least you have not repulsed it, and now you insult and torture me."

"Mr. Elmore, we had better part; you don't understand me," and I turned away.

"Rachel," he said, more gently, and his eyes and voice were full of tears, "I am a wretch, a selfish brute, utterly unworthy of you; but I love you, I love you as nobody ever has loved you, and no one ever will love you. Bear with me: without you life would be a desolate blank."

Elmore's looks, more than his words, moved me. I don't know how it happened, but a moment afterwards my hand was clasped in his, and when we came back to the town Alice, despite her regret at losing me, was made happy by hearing that I was to be married next May Day; less happy was she when she heard that my wedding dress was to be plain white muslin, trimmed with white satin—a law already laid down by my wilful poet. Alice was as pleased

at the thought of a wedding as if it had been her own over again; she said no more of her brother. I rather think that in the pleasurable excitement of the moment, she forgot him.

The news of my engagement soon spread through Warford; many were the congratulations that poured in from people who had seemed either indifferent to, or forgetful of me before.

How strange an importance a probable marriage gives to a woman!

Is marriage really the one great event of life?

Guy gave me a solemn blessing, and "hoped I might be happy." But I could see through all, that he did not quite trust my lover, of whom I was secretly very proud. Guy did not think it enough for happiness to be able to write melodious verses, which should make people's hearts beat with the noble thoughts they enshrined. He did not think it enough to talk like music and look seraphic as Elmore did. I could see he was mentally repeating, "a poet is, as one

may say, just a poet." He had no great faith in "a thing of beauty is a joy for ever." Now I had that faith, and my heart turned to the beautiful as naturally as the flower turns to the sun.

CHAPTER XI.

A LOVERS' QUARREL.

IF love were immortal, man would be immortal too, and while we dream of its eternity, truly the torch-bearer is a divinity. I fancy I thought of Elmore as something beyond and above all the common usages of humanity. How like a glorious vision life spread before me. No young untried enthusiast of fifteen summers ever reared more golden palaces for the future than I. I could not write verses, it is true, but I was growing something of a poet myself, full of fancy and visions, and spells of delight, and happy carelessness, only, alas ! no genius ! unless hero worship may count as such. But how selfish

I grew! how much less I felt the sorrows of others; it seemed as if I could now only sympathize with joy. How often my long, rambling walks with my lover made me forget the duties I had voluntarily taken upon myself. How much less patiently I listened to Alice's long, rambling speeches about pretty dresses, whose glories lived only in her pensive memory, or baby teething, or servant's carelessness, or Guy's long absences, or Julia's persevering residence in Warford, where her only business was to torment Alice, of course.

All this I escaped from oft and again, and hurried away with Elmore to build castles in the air, as if humanity had a right to draw felicity at pleasure, from the stores of heaven.

I was to be all but the author of immortal poems, which were to make our generation wiser and happier. Elmore made me draw up plans for these aerial edifices; he listened earnestly to all I said, and praised and valued my suggestions.

In some of our walks we met Julia Darnel; no

word was ever exchanged between us, only a formal bow ; but though looking straightforward myself, I could perceive that a long side glance from her brown eyes always rested upon Warburton. Then I knew her exact thought, it was, “ Can’t I win that handsome lover from plain Rachel ? She is not worthy of him, and there is something besides in him that interests me, chiefly that he is vowed to another ! ” Did I wrong Julia ? I think not. Did she from real taste choose those lonely country walks ? or, did she throw herself in our way purposely to attract Elmore’s attention, and to lure him from me ? I could not but see her aim, but for some time I was too full of happiness to doubt its continuance.

One day, however, my security, my golden glow of sunshine, was rudely broken through : Julia walked straight up to me, and with a winning smile, winning to all who did not know her, said in the softest tone, “ Rachel, don’t be obdurate, forgive me if I have offended you ; I am ready to make any concessions, rather than

lose your friendship!" Beautiful actress! her voice was soft and tremulous, her eyes swam in tears. Elmore started; the tender voice, the lovely face struck his susceptible fancy; he looked at me with surprise, pain and displeasure too, as he marked the hardness growing in my face, while I answered, "Mrs. Cheveley, the wolf and the lamb may lie down together as friends in the Millennium, but this side of eternity you and I can never be such!" Julia turned aside with well-feigned emotion, and Elmore exclaimed, "Ah, Rachel! what a new and painful feature in your character! I did not know that you could be so unforgiving, that you could hate!"

"Hate, Warburton! truly no. I do not hate any one."

"Yet you repulse that gentle creature who comes to you frankly, humbly asking your forgiveness! I don't know what she has done, but ——"

"To me, nothing!"

"Then why so harsh to her?"

“ Because she is false, her very look is a lie !”

“ How warmly you speak.”

“ I do, for I feel warmly.”

“ And yet, you say yourself that she has not wronged you ?”

“ No ; but she has wronged my dearest friend.”

“ And who may that be ?”

“ Guy Rolfe.”

“ You take up his quarrels hotly ; but what did this beautiful woman do to him ?”

I told Elmore the whole story, at which he smiled.

“ She probably did Mr. Rolfe a great service in breaking off with him ; they could not have been happy together ; a woman of her evident sensibility could never have been the life-long companion of a mere common-place, good sort of man, though Mrs. Rolfe may admire him.”

“ But, Warburton !” I exclaimed, “ do you count promises and vows as nothing ?”

“ I hold that on a man, they are always binding.”

“ May a woman then be dishonourable and go unblamed ?”

“ She may be compelled for her own, or for others' sakes, to change the scheme of her life.”

“ Suppose I should change the scheme of mine, Warburton ?”

“ But you will not, Rachel.”

“ Probably not ; but if I did you would of course hold me blameless ?”

“ You are not the person in question !”

“ But what is law for one woman must be law for another !”

“ Rachel, you are no reasoner !”

“ And you, Warburton, are just a poet ; neither more nor less ; Guy says so.”

“ I will trouble Mr. Rolfe not to meddle in my affairs,” said Elmore, testily, “ and you, Rachel, if you love me, don't try me too far ! beyond all, I beseech you, don't inflict on me the pang of seeing you unforgiving and unwomanly.”

We reached the house door, as the sun set ; involuntarily I looked with a sigh at the last rays.

Warburton echoed my sigh, and murmured in a low voice, "Ichabod!" Did he mean it for the dead glories of the day, or—for our dead love? I returned no answer to his reproachful words, but they sank like lead into my heart.

Had Julia Cheveley really performed her work? had she taken my poet from me?

She had at least shaken the foundation of our love, and faith, and happiness.

The next morning Elmore came, sad and thoughtful; his expressive eyes were covered with a mist, but all trace of vexation was gone. I was too glad to meet him with tacit forgiveness; what is love that can resent? He held a letter in his hand.

"You have news, Warburton?"

"Yes, strange news; half sad, half joyful! Can you bear a surprise, Rachel?"

"Yes, yes! anything but suspense. Tell me!"

"I have an appointment in India."

"An appointment in India, Warburton?"

"Yes. I am not a Burns, but my employment seems to have been chosen with as little regard to my mental capacity, as his excisemanship was chosen for him. Still, the emoluments are large, the work is light, and I cannot well refuse without ingratitude to zealous friends, who have procured the appointment for me. 'I must go in a month or six weeks.'

I felt quite sick and faint ; it seemed as if the earth were reeling beneath me.

"What is it, dearest?" cried Elmore, in alarm.

"You are going!"

"True, but you are going also ; you will not let me depart alone, Rachel?"

Strange to say, at that moment a miserable doubt arose in my mind. Did I love this man truly and deeply enough to forsake country and friends, and all familiar things, to follow him over the wide seas ?—in fact, did my heart love him, or my imagination ?

The answer to my spirit's question did not

come, and I felt dismayed and sick unto death at the prospect of the sacrifice before me ; still, not for a moment was I tempted to break my plighted word, for I have all my life held that honour should be as sacred with a woman, as it is held by true men.

I put my hand silently in Elmore's, to ratify all my promises, and felt happier.

Then Elmore's spirits rose, and he dilated in glowing terms on the beautiful land we should see together, and the brilliant sun that would soon shine above us ; we should be nearer to the sunrise, nearer to heaven itself, in the golden East.

I tried to smile, and to share his enthusiasm.

Poor Alice was in great consternation when she heard the news ; she fairly lifted up her voice and wept, and the child joined in the dismal chorus.

“ Going to India ! Rachel going to India ! Impossible,” repeated Guy, when he came in.
“ What could we do without her ?”

"What, indeed!" cried Alice. "Everything will go wrong, inside and out."

"Rachel has claims on her now, Mr. Rolfe, which must supersede those of mere friendship," said Warburton, rather stiffly.

Guy merely bowed to this remark, but I saw that he bit his lip.

"This day fortnight must be our wedding, Rachel," continued Elmore, turning to me. "We must have some time in town before sailing. You will be ready, dearest?"

"Of course I will be ready."

CHAPTER XII.

L'HOMME PROPOSE ET DIEU DISPOSE.

My wedding dress was nearly completed, the rustic dressmaker was just finishing the white satin trimmings, under my directions, while Alice looked on, divided between admiration of a pretty gown, regret that it was not more showy, delight that there was going to be a wedding, and grief at losing her housekeeper, nurse, lady's maid, and general manager in every department.

"It is very hard that everything goes wrong!" she murmured; "don't you think there should be another bow, dear? Yes, everything goes wrong! Just when we were beginning to be so happy and comfortable, and that wicked Mrs. Cheveley was beginning to let Guy alone, and

the house is getting so pretty and comfortable, just now you must go ! Don't cut that satin straightway, dear. Dressmakers always cut it on the cross, for trimming ; it won't set straight. You surely won't wear a bonnet ?"

" Yes, I think I shall, as I am not a beauty. But what makes you think that Mrs. Cheveye is letting Guy alone, as you call it ?"

" Don't you see her in church ?" asked Alice.

" Yes."

" And don't you see that it isn't Guy she's looking at ?" and Alice looked quite proud of her own sagacity.

" I try not to see her in church," said I, evasively.

" Well, if you don't see, I do !" said Alice. " Why all through the prayers she is stealing glances at Mr. Elmore ! It won't do any harm, you know, as he and you are going so far away, and oh, Rachel, I am so glad it isn't Guy !"

" And I," I exclaimed involuntarily, " I thank God, seas will soon be between her and me."

"But, oh dear! what shall I do, what shall I do without you, Rachel? After all; I'm not sure that satin will go well with muslin. I wonder by what train Mr. Elmore will come back from London! I think we are all ready now, for the wedding!"

"All but the bridegroom!" said Guy, drawing near. "I suppose he must soon appear. To-morrow is your eventful day, Rachel; may it be the precursor of many happy days to you."

"Isn't it perfectly lovely, Guy?" asked Alice, holding up the completed dress. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"Very pretty, indeed; but you are working too late. You should go to sleep now, Rachel, or the agitation of to-morrow will be too much for you."

"I can't sleep till I have seen Warburton!" I could not help saying.

"Well, the last train will soon be in," said Guy, looking at his watch.

"When I was young," said Mr. Rolfe, "the

bridegroom was always before his time, even when the bride was after hers."

When midnight sounded, we were all still sitting, awaiting the arrival of Elmore, but no Elmore came.

Finally, we separated for the night, my friends looking vexed and grave, and I feeling sad and depressed, as if the shadow of some coming evil had already cast its spell upon me.

My Indian outfit was all prepared ; it was not very expensive, yet was large for one so little accustomed to dress and adornment as I. My trunks were ready packed, and even corded, ready for the long voyage, only a few things for present use, and my wedding clothes, were left out. We met at breakfast ; still no bridegroom appeared. The post arrived, and no letter. "A laggard in love!" whispered Mr. Rolfe.

"Perhaps he means to meet us at the church," suggested Guy ; "what do you think, Rachel?"

"That there will be no wedding to-day," said I, trying to laugh, "and Warford and Mrs.

Belton will be very happy, for they will have something to talk about."

"You may as well dress though, dear," said Alice, "at least we shall see how you would have looked!"

I verily believe that Alice considered the wedding garments and the trousseau the best part of a marriage, and thought that "come what might I had been blessed."

Another uneasy hour of suspense and anxiety. Those around me only saw the interrupted wedding; I saw some frightful accident, or great sorrow, which had kept my lover from my side. I knew him well, failings and virtues, weakness and strength; his imagination might make his heart wander from me, but he would always respect his plighted faith. I had no fear of being jilted, much more had I of an unwilling hand clasping mine, to redeem the giver's honour.

"A telegram!" screamed Alice. I snatched it from her hand; my cheek was blanched, and my lips quivering.

"Be yourself, Rachel," said Guy; "accept God's will, we are all in His hands." He took the unread paper from my hands. I believe he thought Elmore was dead, or dying. He glanced over the paper, hesitated, then said, "Nothing wrong, at least, nothing has happened."

"Thank God," I cried, bursting into tears.

"The telegram only says that unavoidable business has kept Mr. Elmore in town; in fact, Rachel, you have met a rival in the printer's devil;—your lover remained away to—correct an important proof!"

"I am grateful that he stayed for no worse reason," said I. "The poem on which his fame will rest, is just going through the press. Warburton knows well enough what I should think—knows that his fame is dearer to me than anything but his honour." I spoke very warmly, for there was an absolute sneer in Guy's voice.

"Still, I consider," said he, "that even a poem should give place to a bride!"

"That is not my creed," I replied. "A poem,

if a fine one—and his are always so—ought to come before all the brides in creation. If a man of genius honours me by his choice, I would have him higher and greater through me, not weakened or hindered by me! But Alice, dear, what is the matter?" for Alice was weeping, as perhaps I might have wept, had I been alone.

"Oh!" sobbed Alice, "I was thinking of what the Warford people will say, and then—all the pastry will be spoilt!"

The last remark did more to enable me to support my dignity than aught else, for it made me laugh.

"Never mind Warford, Alice! let it talk; and as for the pastry, we can employ it well—it shall be a treat for the school children; or still better, shall help us to fulfil the Scripture injunctions, 'When thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, and the halt.'"

"I am most indignant," said Guy.

"But I am not," I cried. "You don't understand Warburton—a true genius is never under-

stood. Our marriage is delayed, but it is not Warburton's fault, it is the fault of circumstances. No woman of refinement would repine at such a delay. Elmore will never act dishonourably, even should our marriage never take place, the fault will not be his. I have the fullest confidence in his honour."

The telegram was to say that, in case his letter of explanation had lost post, which he feared it had, an important proof of his great poem detained him in town. Later in the day the letter came; it was kind and affectionate, but hinted, rather than plainly said, that "our marriage must be delayed for some time; circumstances had arisen, too long to detail on the present occasion, which—but he knew I would trust him fully. He might even be obliged to leave for India without me, to take his appointment, but he would soon get leave of absence to fetch me, or I could join him, under the care of a suitable chaperon. Still, nothing was sure; he would write again," etc., etc.

To say that I did not feel a pang would not be true. It was not the disappointment of cherished hopes, nor the mortification of vanity, nor yet was it fear of the ridicule of the little world in which I lived. No, it was the old, desolate feeling coming over me again, unloved ! alone—alone till eternity !

Warburton would not give me up, for honour's sake ; but I was no longer loved, no longer necessary to his happiness ; his life would long be apart from mine ; he would see fairer and more charming women. However much he might combat it, a new love would spring up in his heart and chase away the last lingering shadow of my image there.

Still I concealed my feelings successfully. I soon reassumed my habitual quiet ways, and went about my old occupations, first uncording my trunks, putting my clothes back into drawers and wardrobes, and hiding the wedding garments far from the sight of those around me, farthest, if possible, from my own.

I burnt the bunch of orange flowers that trimmed my bonnet, and gave the bonnet itself to a young dressmaker, who made a much prettier bride than I should have made.

Warburton wrote again,—wrote twice, long kind letters, with explanations that explained nothing ; he renewed all his old vows of faith—tried to renew in writing the old, glowing picture of our future lives. He “would not come down to Warford to say farewell, it would be too great a trial, but our separation would be short, scarcely a year, if that.” Strange to say he never asked me to keep true to him, never even adverted to the possibility of a change in me. Was it that he trusted me entirely, implicitly, or was it that he knew I had no charms to attract rivals ?

Guy was very severe in the judgment he passed on Warburton, but Warford went beyond him, and openly condoled with me, as a new Ariadne.

I met all this with indignation at first, but by-and-by I grew more callous, frost settled white

and cold around me and my life, and nothing seemed to break the icy spell, till a report reached me that jealousy of Guy had made my lover desert me.

Then I withdrew from the shelter of my friends' house, and became a lodger in that which had been my old home of childhood, but had since been desecrated by strangers.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WRECK ASHORE.

ELMORE had sailed for India, and I—but I must let my own little insignificant heart-history stand awhile, and return to my friends. An awful crash came in their little world ere long—nothing short of bankruptcy ; many creditors put in claims till then unknown to the debtor.

Poor Alice had nothing left, as people say, “to show for it,” but she had privately contracted several bills of considerable amount. It came out afterwards that she had a good deal

of finery secreted, finery which the owner had never been able to use, and whose only value to her, must have been that she could now and then gaze on it privately.

The pitiful ruling passion was strong indeed, and had helped to lodge her husband in prison ; yet she loved him fondly, with that poor helpless love that hangs like a mill-stone round the neck of a man who has to fight for existence, on the dusty battle-field of life.

Before the storm burst, I saw by Guy's pale face of suffering, that he knew he was on the verge of a precipice. In vain I implored him to take my few thousands, wipe out his debts, and start afresh in life ; he would not hear me, but said resolutely "that would be adding dishonour to misfortune. It is not pride, Rachel, that makes me refuse ; it is justice, as I will prove to you. I will give up everything ; there will be no roof to shelter my wife and child for some time. I shall ask you to take them to your home

for a while. We shall be able to meet nearly all our liabilities ; all we could meet, if they would only give me time ; as it is, I am faint with the strife. I must bow my head to the storm. When I come out thence, I will work as never man worked till I pay off the remainder of my debts : law may free me from them, but honour will not."

"Then what is the use of being a bankrupt?" said Alice, plaintively, as she drew near, "I thought that we shouldn't be obliged to pay anyone."

"Good God ! Alice ! Alice ! is there nothing within you that would make you wish to pay to the last farthing, whether obliged to do so, or not?"

Alice looked surprised and confused, but still far from understanding the sense of Guy's words. "I shall send my trunks, and watch, and trinkets, all round to you, Rachel, to take care of till it's all over."

" You don't understand these things, Alice," said Guy, " you must not do anything of the kind."

" Oh, Guy ! who is to have my pretty things, then ?"

" Who, Alice ? Our creditors. We must walk forth from this house in a few days in the clothes we wear, and one change of raiment; in fact, with nothing but absolute necessaries for health and decency. Many of what you call your ' pretty things ' would be odiously ugly in my eyes ; they are not paid for ! I suppose I must make acquaintance with the inside of a prison for a time. I wonder how a man feels upon whom the lock has once turned ! I fancy he must seem to himself a degraded being for ever. But here comes my father."

" Mr. Rolfe entered, walking slowly, with his arms folded, his head bent down, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

We all sat silent; it seemed as if there was a

death in the house, and without, as if the mourners went about the streets.

The winter rain beat hard upon the pane, and the fire burnt low upon the hearth. Presently Guy led me aside and whispered, "Rachel, will you take Alice and the child home with you to-night? I fear their cries and lamentations. What may happen to-morrow would frighten one as much as the other."

"But you, Guy?"

"The captain stays by the ship while a plank is left, unless he is a craven."

I said no more, for I knew that Guy was right; but as I looked on the two broken men before me, I mentally weighed the value of their several wives, and wondered if either deserved the name of help-meet! The elder woman, through her selfish fears, had fled from a falling house; the younger had not forsaken her husband, but her helpless hands had plucked the roof-tree down.

I led Alice away, weeping bitterly ; half at leaving her husband, half on quitting her household gods. The father and son stayed by the wreck ashore.

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT WARFORD THOUGHT.

A FEW days passed, during which I tried to occupy the minds of the two Alices. Then I crept out quietly early one morning, and going down to Guy's house, saw large bills posted on the door, "Household Furniture to be sold at Auction, December 20th, under distress for rent."

I went into a baker's shop, and asked leave to sit down for a few minutes. "Sad thing that's happened over the way, ma'am—miss—I beg your pardon," said the woman behind the counter. "Poor Mr. Rolfe; everybody's sorry for him, and Mr. Guy. Dear me, it seems only the

other day, Mr. Guy was a curly-headed boy, and to think that he's in prison!"

"In prison!" I cried. I knew it was coming, but I did not know that it had come so soon.

"Yes, miss," said the woman, evidently delighted, not at the disastrous news, but at being the first to communicate it to me. "Poor Mr. Rolfe and he was took last night." "We're creditors too," she added, drawing herself up with some dignity, bestowed by the importance of the occasion, "but we've had no hand in the business, so far : I suppose though we must put in our claim now. I suppose you don't lose much, miss?"

"I, Mrs. Barnes!"

"Well, miss, they do say that Mr. Guy have had and have made away with near all your money."

"Then you may tell those that told you, that it's utterly false!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Mr. Rolfe may be unfortunate, but never could be dishonourable!"

"Well, miss, you see people will talk, and they say too, that—you'll excuse me, miss,—they say that gentleman never would have gone off, and behaved so bad to you, if it hadn't been for Mr. Guy."

I wonder what people ought to do, when they hear such things from such sources—treat them with indifference? meet them with silence, or condescend to an explanation? I was silent for a moment from indignation, then decided on the latter course.

"Mrs. Barnes, you have daughters of your own; they have no father."

"True, miss, more's the pity!"

"Suppose God took you also, and left them alone, friendless in this cold world?" Mrs. Barnes began to wipe her eyes. "They would not be so friendless—so lonely as I have been; you would not like to feel that hard hearts and cruel tongues were attacking them, and undeservedly?"

"True, miss, and it's a very bad world."

"I don't say that, Mrs. Barnes ; only when you hear a cruel slander on an honourable gentleman like Mr. Rolfe, who has been like a brother to me ever since my childhood, or of a poor orphan girl like me, don't believe it, and don't spread it further. Besides the unkindness of the thing, it is helping forward what is not true. I don't mind telling you, however, that Mr. Elmore has not gone off, nor behaved badly to me; necessary business has taken him away, but we are still engaged. What is Warford post about not to know that? As for your claim on Mr. Rolfe, you have been kind not to press it before, but I advise you to send it in, with those of the other creditors. I know he is willing and anxious to meet his debts, as far as possible."

I felt very like choking as I left the shop, and walked towards the office to make further enquiries, or rather observations. The same large, ominous bill was posted up there indicat-

ing an approaching sale. The unemployed clerk stood with his hands in his pockets, on the door-step. He touched his hat slightly on recognizing me; formerly he would have lifted it off respectfully. I thereby saw plainly that my fortunes were really believed to be involved in those of the firm of Rolfe and Rolfe. He also took occasion to inform me with some dignity, that he too was a creditor. "I daresay your claims will be met, Mr. Burgess," said I, "meanwhile, be good enough to tell me where Mr. Rolfe is; his wife is anxious to know."

"He's in prison, miss; 'avn't you 'eard the intelligence?"

"Yes, but where—where is the place?"

"At Milney-Stoke, ma'am; if you're going to see Mr. Rolfe, perhaps you'd carry him the letters, private letters, ma'am; this one you see is in a lady's 'and." There was a good deal of hidden, insolent meaning in the man's face and manner.

"I will give the letters to Mr. Rolfe," said I, turning away ; but when I glanced over the addresses, and observed the one the man had indicated to me, I saw the handwriting of Julia Darrel.

CHAPTER XV.

GUY LEAVES PRISON ; AND JULIA DARREL
EXPRESSES HER SYMPATHY.

I CARRIED the other letters to Alice, and after battling hard with her timid fears, I induced her to visit her husband in his lonely prison. I took her to the door of the dismal dwelling, of which Guy was now an inmate. "So soon," I involuntarily exclaimed, as she very quickly afterward rejoined me.

"Oh, I couldn't stay," said Alice, sobbing ; "it made me so wretched to see Guy in that place, and he looked so dejected, it made me feel worse than ever ; so he said I had better come away. He wants to see you very much, Rachel,

to talk to you about some business, and he wishes you'd go the next day that people are admitted."

"I will go at once," I exclaimed.

"Oh, don't leave me alone, Rachel."

"But if poor Guy wants me?"

"I am sure Guy would rather you should take care of me than go to him ; he always thought more of me than himself."

I could not help looking surprised and pained at Alice's naive selfishness, of which she was so utterly unconscious. She was really grieved for Guy, and missed him at every moment from her side, but she could not bear to be with him in distress and to share his trials.

I did not after all visit Guy, for the next day he wrote briefly to say that I had better not come, "for reasons which he would hereafter give," but this explanation was never given.

As Alice and I walked along, she continued to murmur, "I really did think from what they told me, that Guy's being a bankrupt would set everything right, instead of that it has made all

go wrong. And only think, Rachel, he has been so silly, he has gone and given up his watch and chain, and so has Mr. Rolfe. I did so try to persuade them to let me put them in my pocket, the other day. I knew how it would be."

Presently we passed the draper's window, and Alice made a pause ; her eyes were full of tears, yet through their mist she cast a pensive glance on the new shawls and mantles, and dresses, and laces and gay ribbons and flowers.

" Dear me, how many beautiful things there are in the world," she ejaculated.

" Truly there are, Alice," said I " love and honour and self-denial." But Alice was as one blind and deaf to all that could not be discerned by the common senses.

At last she suddenly asked, " Were there no other letters for Guy ? he seemed to expect more."

" We must inquire for more to-morrow," I answered, " poor Guy has had enough for one day, so has Mr. Rolfe. Did you see him also, Alice ?"

"Yes, but he had nothing to say, or very little. I could not help thinking it was half his fault."

"His fault, Alice!"

"Yes, why didn't he manage the business better?"

"He has evidently done his best."

"His best, Rachel!" I'll tell you what he has done in my very sight. One of the letters addressed to him contained a cheque, and he has been as silly as Guy; he has enclosed it to his assignees. How much better it would have been bestowed on the poor child and me; we havn't a thing to wear!" Then Alice wept again. Poor Alice! and alas, for those whose lives were destined to blend for ever with that poor, vacant life! Guy's cup was full, and bitter in its fulness.

The people who passed us in the street stared curiously, and those that knew us stared the most. Alice's hair was disordered, and her face tear-stained. She seemed quite insensible to the observation of the curious, to misconstruction, animadversion. She only felt the privation of

Guy's society, the loss of her house, and of her personal belongings.

I tried to prevent her feeling her altered position ; I surrounded her with every comfort , I dressed the child prettily, as well as neatly ; I made the two the study of my life.

Still. I found that Alice crept secretly to the shops in the town, and humiliated herself to ask credit for useless, superfluous articles of finery ; the ruling passion was too strong to be slain, even by sorrow ; at least, it outlived the sorrow she had yet known.

The days passed wearily, wearily. I grew more indifferent to what people said or thought ; but there was deep sadness in my life. The ray of sunshine that had passed through my colourless existence by Elmore's love, had become clouded, and all the beauty and glory that had but lately shone on my path, was as a dream when one awaketh.

Now and then came a letter from the far-off land ; kind, gentle, and even affectionate, full of

poetry and of brilliant thoughts ; but I felt it was only the shade of a dead love that came to me as a pleasant visitation, and that the real destiny of my life lay with the friends among whom I had cast my lot.

We were sitting in the twilight, in a little room that bad been my mother's, one of the very few that Mr. Vincent had left unaltered.

It was mid-winter ; snow lay on the ground without, ice tracery was all over the windows, and the curtains were drawn to keep out the north-east wind ; but one little bit was left, so as to let in a bar of white light from the moon ; it fell upon Alice's face, as she lay on the sofa with closed eyes, sleeping, or dreaming awake, in her own little world. "Don't leave the door open, it's so cold," she murmured. I, too, felt a sudden rush of cold air ; and, looking up, saw in the open doorway a man's figure, in a rough great coat, upon which the snow-flakes lay thickly ; they lay, too, upon his dark hair and in his thick beard. It was Guy ; but thin and

worn, and deadly pale. I had not seen him for several weeks—not since the prison gate had closed upon him ; and now he came so unexpectedly, it was like one brought back from the dead. “ Guy !” I exclaimed. Alice rushed to her feet, then into his arms, and laughed and cried, and laughed again. “ Poor child !” said he, putting back her hair, and kissing her forehead, as if she were a child, “ has it lost all its pretty playthings ?”

“ Take off your damp coat, sit down, and I will get you some supper, Guy, and then you can tell us all about it,” said I, “ but, truly, it now seems that you are come like Peter, when the angel had opened his prison door, and he came to his friend’s house, and the damsels Rhoda opened not the gate for joy.”

I went out of the room hastily, to make preparations, and when I returned I found that in the fulness of her happiness, and according to her invariable custom in such moments of glad

emotion, Alice had dropped asleep at her husband's feet, her head resting on his knee.

"Poor child!" repeated he, "how much she has suffered!" and he tenderly stroked her fair hair, and forgot the ill management, and extravagance, and disorder, and the pretty silks and laces, and the countless trinkets and baubles that had helped to send him to prison. "Speak low, Rachel, don't wake her. What an innocent little face it is!" said Guy, bending over her.

"But how did you get out of that wretched place, Guy? Did the angel really go to you?" I asked.

"I think he did come," answered Guy, solemnly, "at least, God's good angels watched over me. We have our discharge; they say that no dishonour rests on my dear father's name, nor on mine; our creditors get twelve shillings in the pound. But a man who has once been in prison is no longer the same being. Henceforth my business in life is to earn, to the utmost

farthing, all I can, to pay the remainder to which honour binds me, though law does not. But having no capital, I cannot go on with my old profession ; besides, our practice is sold."

"Guy, make me happy !" I exclaimed. "Take part, take all my little money."

"No, good Rachel, never! never! I speak from common honesty, not from pride; indeed, I shall have to come to you for a little present help, for enough to keep the old man and my wife and child alive till I get employment; but I will not ruin you to save myself. You must not go a portionless bride to Elmore."

"I shall never be Elmore's wife!"

"You are not going to break with him? Rachel, it would not be like you."

"No, I am bound in honour to him as long as he claims my promise; I am bound to him in affection, too, as long as he deserves it; but I believe, nevertheless, that there is a gulf between our lives that will never be bridged over."

"Rachel," said Guy suddenly, "you sent me

a packet of letters ; did you send me all you had ? ”

I looked at Alice before replying. There still lay the sleeping head, partly shaded by thick, bright, fair hair, the rosy lips parted, with a happy smile. “There was one more,” I said in a low voice, “one that I did not like to send ; forgive my keeping it back.” I motioned to Guy to read silently, and handed the letter, putting the lamp nearer. He held his hand over Alice’s eyes, shading them from the light, but I could see the hand that held the paper trembled, though a bitter smile passed over his face the while. He read the letter twice through, deliberately, as it seemed ; then he said “Rachel shall you say, ‘I told you so ? ’ read that, then put it in the fire.”

“ DEAR MR. ROLFE,

“ I am quite sorry to hear of your misfortunes, and I write directly to tell you so ; also to say something of consequence.

“ I dare say you remember I offered, some time ago, to lend you a little money, at interest? You refused my offer then; perhaps you might think differently now; so, for fear of disappointing you, I think it best to say at once that, under present circumstances, I must withdraw my offer. Your bankruptcy, of course, wipes off all old encumbrances, and enables you to start afresh in life. I dare say your wife has something snugly put by, and that you have provided for a rainy day; so you will do very well, and I am sure you have my sincere good wishes.

“ I shall not see you again, for I am just on the point of going abroad. Goodbye. I shall always feel a deep interest in you, in remembrance of old times.

“ Yours very truly,

“ JULIA CHEVELEY.

“ Pray take care that none of my papers get lost. I have appointed Messrs. Lock and Ward, of Clement’s Inn, as my lawyers; please send all

my documents to them, and see about it at once. I know I owe you a little matter for business, but it is no good paying you, as I should have a second claim made on me by the assignees, etc., etc."

I made no comment, but laid the paper on the dull red coals, and they burst into a blaze. The flame woke Alice.

"Rouse yourself," said I, "and make Guy's tea, while I carve."

"I feel stronger than when I entered this room to-night!" said Guy, looking affectionately at Alice, but seeming to address me. "There's a good deal of quiet strength in you, Rachel, and you have the art of imparting it to others."

Presently Guy got up to leave us. "Where are you going?" asked Alice, quickly. "I shall not let you leave me again."

"I have left the poor old man sad and ill."

"Where?"

"In a little lodging which I have taken,"

said Guy ; " there is only room for two, Alice. I cannot take you home, poor child."

" But you will stop here with me, Guy ; you must—you shall."

" But my father?"

" Oh, some one will take care of him!"

" I must do that, Alice. I leave you in comfort—nay, in luxury ; be satisfied, and let me do my duty!" Guy burst away, and Alice began to weep and lament.

CHAPTER XVI.

GUY FINDS A POST, AND HIS FATHER DESIRES
TO FIND REST.

IT was scarcely the same man who bent over the desk of Messrs. Screw and Pincher, the Warford bankers, acting as clerk, receiving their orders, doing their bidding, as if he had done it all his life.

They were rough, unpolished, business men; honourable, reliable, good in their way, giving their half-crowns rather willingly when there were collections at church, their five shillings when they were called upon for subscriptions, rather less cheerfully. But they were not

troubled with an excess of sensibility, which might lead to the uncomfortable and irrational result of making their neighbours' troubles their own. They were "sorry to see so worthy and deserving a young man" as Guy Rolfe cast out of employment; they knew him to be steady and trustworthy, and that they were at once performing a benevolent action and serving their own interests in giving him the vacant stool in their counting-house, which their confidential clerk had just vacated to better himself. They had calculated that one hundred a-year would be a boon to the man who had given up his last penny to his creditors, and that he who had willingly given it up would be exactly the person to whom they could entrust the care of their strong box, without an after-thought. What was wanting to the young lawyer in business details, he would soon acquire, and it was a good investment at once in interest and character; it forwarded the views of Messrs. Screw and Pincher, and raised their reputation.

Guy was, however early, a broken man. What he said was true. He upon whom the lock of a prison has turned, is never the same again. In work, he would be energetic, for conscience and honour's sake; but his spirit was crushed, he was prematurely bowed down, and now and then the pen would fall from his hand, the busy calculation would stand still, his head would sink on his folded arms, showing as it bent down an unnatural streak of silver here and there among the dark curls.

Alice asked him why he was bowed down ?
He answered, though not given to poetizing,

“ What can give to the bow over-bent
The spring that it carried before ? ”

Guy, and Alice, and the father lived in a mean lodging, with little to remind them of old times. Dull, confined rooms, looked out on a duller court. The child would have pined to death there. I pretended loneliness, and kept her with me. After a little while, Alice wished to come

also, but I discouraged the idea ; it seemed so cruel to leave poor Guy alone, with his sad memories and his broken life. The old man used to sit in a corner of their dismal room, shading his eyes from the light, and now and then sighing. He talked also of a clerkship, but it seemed cruel that he, so worn, so broken with cares and sorrows, should labour as a subordinate to younger men than himself. His search was long and unsuccessful. Warford whispered that he was scarcely to be entrusted with other's affairs, who had so dreadfully mismanaged his own. Some good-natured gossip brought this little bit of scandal to the bankrupt gentleman, and from that time he was more visibly broken. Hour after hour he wandered up and down the river's banks, looking into the deep waters, perhaps thinking of the absent mother of his child, of whom he never spoke, perhaps wondering whether the cold waves could wash out painful memories. Guy sent me a hurried note by a boy, one day, " For God's sake to watch over his

father ; he was so unquiet about him, he could not rest, he had heard of his wandering by the waterside ; he apprehended he knew not what ; he wrote to me because that poor child Alice could not understand." He ended with, " Dear, kind Rachel, you once saved my life from that river ; perhaps God means you to save a better and more valuable life than mine." I went to the dismal lodgings, and asked Mr. Rolfe to come and teach me chess. The next day he came, but soon grew restless, and would wander forth. I begged leave to go with him, and taking the child by the hand, we went out. Though it was mid-winter, he insisted on walking by the cold river-banks, whose waters seemed to run even colder and darker for the snow which had fallen into them.

He stood still and gazed down into the gloomy stream, his eyes were glazed and fixed ; then a quiver came over his lips, and he murmured, half to himself, half speaking to me, " What is it to lie down and rest ? Has not a tired man a right

to claim repose ?” I felt his arm was loosening itself from mine, and that slowly, but surely, his foot drew near the brink. But I still leant on him, passing my hand more round his arm. “ Mr Rolfe,” said I ; he did not hear me, “ Mr. Rolfe, when Guy and I were children ”—he turned towards me a little, showing that his mind was awakened—“ did you ever hear,” I continued, “ of course you heard, but do you remember how poor Guy was saved from death in that river ? Brutus saved him—my dog Brutus.”

“ Saved him, poor boy ! Saved him—for what ?”

“ For duty and honor, Sir,” I answered. “ See what respect he has won, what friendship, by his noble conduct.”

“ And he has to labour like a slave ; and I—I hang on him the dead weight of a useless burden. Would not death be better ?”

“ For him ?”

“ For me, Rachel. He has enough to toil for.”

“ But is it not light labour to work for those we love ? Without that, Guy could not live.

Surely you would not make his life more bitter, more sorrowful than it is?"

"I am a selfish coward," said the old man, "but my utter helplessness unmans me."

By this time we had turned, and had almost lost sight of the sullen river, that went on moaning, moaning through the winter day.

"It was a pleasant dream," said Mr. Rolfe, slowly, "a pleasant dream to think of sleep and rest. Rachel, do you ever think of these things? But no, you have never suffered."

Ah! so it seemed to him; yet "the heart knoweth its own bitterness." "At least I have thought of rest," I answered, "as a pleasant thing." I have thought of 'He giveth his beloved sleep,' as the sweetest and gentlest of soothing words; but let us all wait to slumber till our father draws the curtain round us, and the angels take their watch at head and foot; surely no other rest is holy."

Little by little I drew him away from the fatal spot, to which he never returned. Slowly the old

man's life settled down into a quiet melancholy. He sometimes took the child on his knee, and tried to smile as he arranged her toys on the table before them, or amused her by childish stories, from which his own mind wandered.

Slowly, slowly time crept on. Mr. Rolfe kept close by my side ; little Alice was there, and he grew accustomed to my quiet ways. Sometimes his eyes followed my needle for an hour, in its monotonous course ; then he would sigh, and say, " Poor Alice, poor Alice ! Guy and she are ill-matched, but he is good to her ! very good. Ah ! if youth knew what age would bring ! if it only knew ! God teach this child to think and feel."

And Guy went on with his work, and toiled as never man toiled. Alice was by turns caressing and tearful ; never reproachful, and yet always repining.

CHAPTER XVII.

NOTHING TO WEAR.

WINTER had gone by, and the spring came round fair, and green, and smiling. The old man was calmer, and more interested in our doings.

Guy began to hold up his head a little, as if a ray of hope had entered his heart, struggling hard against the iron chain of care that bound him down.

Alice was less calm than any of us. If any one spoke to her of hope and happiness, she seemed deaf to the words, refusing to hear the voice of the charmer, charmed he never so wisely.

One day she went to Guy at the Bank. Many

a long year after he told me of what had passed :
“ Guy, darling, you say you are going on well,
is it true ?”

“ Much better, Alice ; and if we continue to be careful, we may even have something to put by at the end of the year, towards our great debts.” Alice always sighed at the mention of the word “ debts,” which she fondly believed a bankruptcy ought to sweep out of the vocabulary ; but she only said, “ You have already saved a little money, Guy ?”

“ A trifle, dearest.”

“ How much ? What do you call a trifle ?”

“ A trifle in comparison with what we owe ; still a good deal to such poor people as we, twenty pounds.”

“ Guy, dearest ! ”

“ Yes, darling.”

“ Can’t you give me a little money ?”

“ For what, little wifie ? ”

“ Oh, for a secret.”

“ Tell me what it is.”

“ Mayn’t I have a little money, Guy? just ever so little?”

“ Well, how much must you have?” rather impatiently.

“ Five pounds darling; only five pounds.”

“ Five pounds, Alice? It would be robbery of my creditors, just one-fourth of the little nest-egg put by to meet our honest debts. No, Alice, I cannot give you five pounds; you shall have one, if you like.”

“ Only one, Guy! only one?”

“ Only one, Alice.”

“ Oh, Guy! when you know that the poor child and I have nothing to wear;” and she sobbed and cried.

Guy unlocked the large office desk which stood before him, took from it a small pocket-book, and hastened from the room. When he returned he looked sternly at Alice; her whole frame quivered; she seemed to cower beneath his severe glance; she leaned against the table, and a film covered her eyes.

Guy's frown dispersed immediately when he saw her pale face.

"Poor child," he cried, "forgive my harshness. There, I have got this miserable money changed; take your five pounds; after all I should not expect you to understand, or to enter into these sort of things."

"It is no use to me now," said Alice, putting back the money; and she spoke in a broken voice, and went away weeping.

Poor Guy! perhaps the old man was right: for what had Brutus saved you from the deep waters?

And before the poor young clerk lay in that open desk rolls of bank-notes and piles of gold; he gazed upon them speculatively, then put in his hand in an absent sort of way, and let the bright gold coins shower over his fingers. "To wish it mine, is even as though I made it so," he whispered to himself, "it is robbery, sin, and dishonour. Lead us not into temptation," he added; the gold pieces had fascination for

his eyes such as they had never had before; he shut the desk, but presently opened it again, and let the coins fall over his fingers.

* * * * *

The next morning Guy was taken up for robbery.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HOW MESSRS. SCREW AND PINCHER LOST MONEY.

NOTES to the amount of £150 were missing from the coffers of Messrs. Screw and Pincher. When the deficiency was discovered, those respectable gentlemen were much agitated ; but they believed the notes to be merely mislaid ; a rigorous search was instituted. Guy Rolfe, the confidential clerk, was severely reprimanded for carelessness—certainly for nothing more ; he received rather a peremptory order to make the loss good, and received also his dismissal.

I was with Alice when her husband came home ; his white face and agitated manner pre-

pared us for something terrible. Alice approached to kiss him, but he put her back, not very gently, saying, with a bitter smile, " You had better go and dress ; adorn yourself in your grandest finery—we shall have company presently, perhaps."

Alice shrunk back. Mr. Rolfe laid his hand on his son's arm, and looked, rather than asked the question " What is it ? "

" It is a prison again, father," he murmured ; " a prison with a hundred-fold dishonour. Disown me, sir, I am no son of yours ; take your name from me, since through me it is made vile."

" My God ! my God ! I thought my cup was full ? " cried the old man, clasping his hands. " What is it ? What have you done ? " groaned he distractedly.

" You will know soon—very soon. Leave her as she is," said Guy, sternly, seeing me try to restore the fainting Alice ; " she will only unman me more by her lamentations. Listen to me,

Rachel ; take care of the honest old man, and the innocent child ; as for my wife and me, we are both marked for vagabondage ; leave us to our fate."

Then he threw himself at his father's feet, and besought him to say farewell, and to go with me. "Never?" said Mr. Rolfe ; "whatever comes, my boy, we will meet the storm together." Then, still kneeling before the old man, and bowing his head down on his father's knees, in broken words, and a more broken voice, Guy told the story of the lost money.

"But it will be found, it must be found?" cried the father.

"No, father, it is stolen ; I tell you, stolen ; do you hear?"

"But what have you to do with it, Guy ? Nothing ? nothing ?"

"You will see, sir."

All this time Alice lay moaning on the sofa. Presently I saw that she slightly, and very cautiously opened her eyes, furtively following

all Guy's movements. Suddenly Mr. Rolfe rose, and took his hat.

"Where are you going?" I asked, in alarm.

"Down to the bank, to know the worst," he answered.

"Leave us alone, Rachel," said Guy, trying to speak calmly; "leave us alone, now."

"Let me stay with you and Alice, brother Guy."

"No, no; I must speak alone with my wife. We have to talk, to consult together."

"But I may come back?"

"Yes, in the evening. I may have one more friendly office to ask from you then; now leave us."

I was going from the room, when Alice darted from the sofa, and clung to me whispering, "Don't leave me with Guy, Rachel; oh, I am so much afraid of him." But Guy put me out and locked the door. I could not stir from the spot. I could not distinguish their words; of course, I did not try to hear them; but Guy spoke like a

madman, and Alice cried, and sobbed, and murmured broken words. I heard that he was walking up and down the room with hasty steps, and the furniture was dragged about, and the chairs overthrown. Still Alice sobbed, but presently Guy came out; finding me still there on the staircase, he said, "Go to her Rachel, if your charity extends so far."

I found Alice weeping more violently still. Every drawer and receptacle had been ransacked, and the contents lay strewn around in utter confusion. Instinctively I began to reduce the chaos to decent order; Alice said nothing, noticed nothing. Presently I left her, and hurried home; my head and heart were full, and yet more alive in the past than the present. Guy was a bright-headed boy once more, struggling for life in the cold river, and I, a child, standing alone in my terror on the bank, thinking could I save him—and how? Replace the money? but that would not clear his honour.

I went out into the familiar garden, and

into the arbour overgrown with trailing plants. I knelt down and prayed and wept. Then I gathered strength, and resolved to go to Guy's employers. I had no time to weigh the cost of unrighteous judgments and misrepresentation ; had I had time, I scarcely think I should have remembered the consequences of my act. I went straight to the bank, asked to see either partner. Mr. Pincher appeared, looking solemn and angry, a little sad, too ; that sadness gave me hopes. I felt that I was very pale, and that my whole frame trembled, but I forced myself to speak calmly. "Mr. Pincher, you have money of mine in your hands."

"Certainly, you have a drawing account ; but are you aware, Miss Arden, that the balance in the bank is small—only ninety pounds ! Mrs. Rolfe presented your cheque for twenty-five the other day."

I bowed. "Still I must have what you hold. I must have it, and at once."

Mr. Pincher looked at me with a fatherly sort

of compassion. I approached the counter, and my money was counted out to me.

"Now, Mr. Pincher, I must speak to you in private." He led the way into a little room, and placed a chair for me.

"Mr. Pincher, Mr. Guy Rolfe and his wife are the dearest friends I have in the world. I have no relations—no claims upon me, but those of their child, and my god-child. You will take this money. I hear that you have lost one hundred and fifty pounds, for which Mr. Rolfe is responsible."

"I thought we had lost the sum. I hoped it was only lost ; I find it has been—stolen."

"Stolen ? stolen ?"

"Yes, stolen !"

"Well, either lost or stolen, it is my wish to replace it. Please take this ninety pounds, and you shall have the rest soon. But what heartless wretch has—"

Mr. Pincher shook his head.

“Put up your money, Miss Arden ; it is too late.”

“Too late ?”

“Too late ; and do you know the consequences that would ensue on your generosity ?”

“I know them. I should be misjudged ; few are generous enough to believe a woman’s actions disinterested ; but at such a moment I cannot think of myself. For God’s sake take this money.”

“Impossible ! The poor old man has been with me this morning, begging for mercy ; would I could have granted it !”

“Mercy ! to whom ?”

“To the culprit.”

“To the culprit !” I cried, “is he then known ?”

“Alas ! yes ; I wish he were not. He has given himself up.”

“Who ? who ? Of whom are you talking ?”

“Of Guy Rolfe, to whom I would have entrusted millions.” .

“Great God ! this cannot be.”

“But it is ; the examination before the magistrate has already taken place ; a fair and careful examination, by a man whose chief care was to find a loop-hole for Rolfe’s escape ; but his guilt is too clear—he is committed for trial.”

“A gentleman must speak to you, Sir,” said a clerk ; he seemed to avoid using the name.

“Tell him I am busy—engaged. Yet stay ; it may be important.”

“It is a question of life and death. Let me in, I say. I will see Mr. Pincher ?”

It was the voice of Guy’s father, who entered, his white hair disordered, and great beads of perspiration standing on his forehead. There was not so much sorrow as proud, passionate indignation in his face and demeanour ; the sunken eyes flashed, and every feature worked.
“Sir, you have dared to accuse my son ?”

“Mr. Rolfe, I feel for you deeply ? The world calls me a hard man, a mere money-grubber ;

perhaps I am one ; but I would rather bear this loss, almost any loss, than—”

“ He is innocent ! he is innocent ! My God ! my God ! Can’t thou keep silence when the innocent are oppressed ? You know he did not do it ! ”

“ Mr. Rolfe, I know nothing—positively nothing. Your unhappy son gave himself up ; I did not accuse him. The examination is over. You are a lawyer ; you know I can do nothing in this unhappy business.”

“ And you would not see me while it was yet time ? ”

“ I could not, Mr. Rolfe.”

“ Truly, he can do nothing,” I whispered to the stricken old man, “ but God can do all things ! Come away.” I led him to my home, whither Alice had already been conveyed.

Alice was awed into silence : I had never seen her so before. She neither wept nor sighed, but was prostrate, mind and body. Fortunately for him, the wretched father was attacked by

illness, and soon lost all sense of the misery around him.

That was a day never to be forgotten in the calendar of time; scarcely could its remembrance be effaced in eternity?

Guy was in a felon's prison; he had voluntarily yielded himself to dishonour.

Still I believed in him.

CHAPTER XIX.**THE FATE OF GUY.**

WARFORD was busy talking, yet many a generous heart beat with pity and sympathy for so great a sorrow.

In the house, it was as if death had entered it, all was silence and shadow ; heaven's face seemed veiled : outside the wind howled, and the rain beat dismally on the panes.

Mr. Rolfe was insensible ; Alice silent as the dead ; as helpless as usual, but less a charge than I had ever known her before.

At times I think I forgot what had happened, yet I felt rather than knew, that something fearful was going on. Sometimes it seemed that

Guy was gone down among the silent dead, resting from his labours and sorrows ; one almost expected to look up and see mourning garments on the wife and child, who appeared awe-struck, without knowing, or understanding wherefore.

An intimation came that by unusual indulgence Guy might see his friends. Alice shuddered when she was made to understand that she might visit her husband. She looked at me imploringly, but said nothing, still her look implied, “ Spare me !” I was sore perplexed, yet surely it would comfort Guy to see that he was not utterly forsaken.

We prepared to go to him ; when a message came that we were not to come, he would see no one till the trial was over. Once more he commended the child and father to my care ; of Alice he said nothing. She shivered and sighed, half terror, half relief. And this was the end of the love and romance of so few years before—so very few !

But why dwell on those days of darkness ?

They passed, and the trial came and passed too, and the sharp pang of hearing “Guilty,” and Guy was to go over the wide seas, branded for ever with a felon’s name. The day of final parting came. I led the feeble old man, newly risen from a sick bed, to the prison door, and waited his return, without. Presently he came back to me, or, rather, was brought back, unconscious of all around. Then I went again, with Alice, she white as the snow that lay around us on the ground.

She was alone with Guy for some time; presently a warder called me in to the cell. Alice was lying at her husband’s feet, clasping his knees, while his hands were lifted together, as if in an agony of supplication. In the dim prison light he looked so white, and thin, and spectral; but he was striving to be calm.

“Take Alice home, sister Rachel,” he said in a low voice, “and then, if you are allowed entrance, return to me.”

But Alice still lay upon the ground.

He raised her with a sort of tender gravity, “Farewell, poor child!” he murmured, but she made no response; he wound his arms round her and lifted up the child-like face to his. “Alice!” there was no answer. “Little wife!” she started, and then looked up. “Alice, you will make me a promise, won’t you?” She flung herself into his arms in a passion of tears. “You will teach our child to be good, Alice—you will try to teach her, won’t you? Keep her from the love of fine clothes and vanity, and we may yet all be happy—in Heaven.”

I turned aside, there was an agonized whisper from Alice, a few soothing words from Guy, and then he led her to the door and put her in my keeping; from that time forth she was a silent woman.

“Rachel,” said Guy, when for the last time I stood before him, “in old times you and I were a sort of Paul and Virginia; you remember, don’t you?” I bowed my head. “It is all so vividly before me now. Our childish plays in

your father's garden, the very fishing net you made me. I seem to see it here; I see the river's banks, where you and Brutus saved me. You have been strangely faithful to me, Rachel! Your mother was my mother. God refused me any other. You have been more than a sister to me. You have done for me what none other would; but you will do yet one thing more?"

"Anything! all things, Guy!"

"First answer me one question, do you believe me guilty?"

"I know you are innocent, Guy."

"God bless you for that word of comfort, Rachel," said he solemnly, taking my two hands in his.

"Now promise to heed what I say?"

"I will."

"Swear to me to do my will—swear to me as to a dying man."

"I swear."

"That when you hear me accused, you will never defend my name!"

"Oh, Guy, that were too much!"

"You have promised, Rachel; you have sworn. Leave my cause to God. You see how calm a Christian can be, in more than death. And now, dear, hear my last words. You will be a daughter to the good old man, a providence to the child, but Alice, you will be patient and tender to her, won't you? I have often been hard and wrong towards her, I know; but I would have her spared, the more so, as but for me, she would have been as happy as a skylark. I know you will go beyond my wishes, for you are true and steadfast. If you go to India—"

"I don't think I shall ever go there, Guy, but if duty calls me, those you confide to me shall be well cared for."

"I know it. Now, Rachel, I will try you no more. Go home, dear, go home; and may God bless you."

The thin white hands rested upon my head for a minute, as if in blessing, and as the warder led me forth my last look fell upon Guy kneeling by

his pallet, a ray of light from the grated window
falling upon his untimely grey head.

* * * * *

Thus closed a long, sad chapter of my life. Guy sailed alone over the wide seas, and I had three helpless beings depending on me at each moment. I feared to look on the present ; feared to look into the future ; dreaded to glance into my own heart. Faith failed ; and it seemed that human strength could bear no more sorrow ; it seemed, too, that I could not rouse myself to daily tasks, or to look with interest on anything that is done under the sun.

Ah, there is the post. The post from India ; a letter from Warburton, my lover—my husband that is to be. Alas ! there is no pulse of joy or love within me. I read the poet's brilliant words unawakened from painful dreams and memories. My heart is dead ; still I will, with God's help, stand firm “ to duty and honour.”

* * * * *

CHAPTER XX.

ALICE'S CHANGE.

TIME is the great consoler for the woes of the happy dead. As she lays her hand on the mourner, a tender regret takes the place of passionate grief—a regret that is not all sorrow, but allows a thousand sweet memories to grow above the sacred grave, like the little flowers that spring from its green hillock.

It was another kind of death that had been among us, leaving a sting behind it which time might blunt, but could not soften into quiet sadness.

The little party was gathered around the hearth at which my father and mother had sat;

the silent, melancholy old man, Alice, still young in years, but a shadow of herself, her brave attire all gone, a plain black gown replacing the showy finery which had formerly delighted her, her bright, fair hair tightly gathered in a dark net, her eyes wild and wandering, and her mouth compressed, as though to keep in every breath. She lived as if in an absorbing dream of some mysterious horror, but sometimes roused herself when the child was near, though in general she left to me the entire charge of her little daughter. One day I had dressed her with more than usual care, to take her out, but Alice snatched her from my hand, saying sharply, " You are teaching my child to be wicked, Rachel! No more fine clothes; no more fine clothes for her or me; they cost too dear. And I have promised, I have sworn! Oh, Rachel, Rachel! help me to be good," she added, softening till she wept. She took off the pretty frock, much to little Alice's vexation, who already developed a very natural satisfaction

in becoming attire, and could not understand why she should be different to other children. So it was with her, however, for Alice was always violently excited if the child looked like anything but a Puritan, and that an ill-dressed one.

She had one ruling idea, which reached a mania; all her errors and sorrows being traceable to dress, she seemed to feel, rather than think, that some mysterious expiation was being worked out by her present course; besides, the passion of her life was slain.

We met with more kindness than I could have hoped; I say we, for I was completely identified with the sorrowful family.

Many of our neighbours, of course, passed by on the other side, holding their garments cautiously away, lest they should be defiled by contact with those so nearly allied to a convicted felon; there were people on whose hard natures neither affliction nor time, had any softening power.

But life is not all a barren wilderness, and, thanks be to the God that made us, there are noble souls among us, and many, many who, if not noble, can melt from seeming pride and frost to tender sympathy. Many who had kept aloof from us, or seemed inimical, came round us with offers of help in the hour of need, and with countenance and support in that of obloquy.

The general persuasion was that the law had judged righteously in poor Guy's case, but little reached my ears in the way of harsh comment. Our old pastor, in preaching, often enjoined severity on ourselves, tenderness to others.

"I think he seems to know the truth about Guy," whispered Alice to me one evening, while leaving the church.

"You mean that he knows he is innocent?"

"No, no," she answered, hastily. "God only knows; nobody else, Rachel, nobody else! Everything was done to save him."

"Everything but one, Alice."

"What was that?" she asked quickly.

“For the guilty one to confess.”

“Guy said they were to seek for no one else. Guy gave himself up, you know; you know he did!”

“Alas, yes! I know it, and but that I cannot lie, I would have claimed the guilt myself to spare him.”

“Would you, Rachel, and be—be punished so, and sent away?”

“Surely I would, and I am but his sister. You—you, bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh—Oh, Alice, did you not want to take it upon you?”

“Upon me! me! Rachel; you are killing me! Guy told me he would make you promise to be kind to me; he did make you promise, I know, and you see how I have given up everything, everything in the world, and you ought to keep your word, or you will have lied to Guy.”

Yes, it was true. I had promised, I had sworn, and my word must be kept as to the dead who have entered into their rest and have ceased from

the works that are done under the sun. Alice had given up everything—the pride of the eye, and the pride of life—all, and everything, *but* selfishness and cowardliness. Joy and hope were dead within her, but the instinct of self-preservation was vital still.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LOVER WHO HAS SEEN THE WORLD.

A FEW years had died their death of pleasure or pain. My surroundings were unaltered ; Alice was still the untidy-looking Puritan, sometimes seizing on a needle, and working with excited eagerness, she said, "for her living," but more frequently sitting listlessly, gazing into space, and always starting like a terrified child at the least unusual noise within or without the house. Mr. Rolfe, happily for himself, took to reading old books of devotion ; sometimes he buried himself in a worm-eaten volume, but when roused from his study, his lips would quiver, and his whole frame tremble with awaking memory.

The child was full of life; not even our solemn faces could repress her buoyant spirit. She had all Alice's beauty, with a good deal of intelligence and vivacity, which made her a much fairer picture than her mother had ever been. She learned willingly, and with seeming pleasure, the little lessons I gave her. She had missed her father at first, and was intelligent enough to understand why he was absent; but the story had been carefully kept from her, and so she had really no sorrow in the morning of her life, except that she loved fine clothes, and must not have them; besides, an occasional mysterious exclamation of her mother's came to whet her curiosity, which, nevertheless, remained unsatisfied. My correspondence with Elmore flagged, despite myself. Directly he learned what had been going on, he urged me to leave Warford, and to separate my life entirely from that of my friends, "plunged," as he expressed it, "in the lowest depths of degradation." He added that he was "not astonished at the story of crime and misery;

a man of honour never was a bankrupt, and he who consented to be such was on the high road to open criminality, &c.; he had always disliked Mr. Rolfe, and suspected something underhand in him," &c. It will be seen that I had not listened to Elmore's advice, and was far from sharing his opinions. A few more letters passed between us, each cooler in its tone than the last; finally came a dead silence, and I only heard of my sometime lover through the press, when his name appeared as the author of a new work. Was the fault of this rupture mine or his? or was it only the fault of time or absence? Thus died my second love; honour and conscience had rooted up my first from my heart; what had slain the last in my imagination? I did not know at first. I am not sure that I know now. Was it that Elmore was weak and vain? or was it that I had never loved him? Still I could not understand that my pledged faith had come back to me again.

But I had once had another lover than Elmore, and he no poet either; he suddenly reappeared

on the scene. One night he slipped in, in the dusk, and made Alice scream, when he stood unrecognized before her, wrapped in a great coat, muffled up to the eyes, where a slouched hat nearly met the thick coils of a comforter. The winter fire alone lit up those cold, pale blue eyes. I knew their owner before my companion did, and I think I spoke very sharply.

“Don’t frighten your sister, Mr. Vincent.”

“My sister!” said he, with a pompous air: “it depends entirely on herself whether I acknowledge her as such.”

“Indeed!”

“Oh, ‘Tom! Tom! my dear, dear Tom! we have had such trouble!’” sobbed Alice; then she feebly rose, and was going to throw herself into his arms, but he waved her back, with a sort of burlesque dignity.

“Wait, Alice; wait till I know the truth. You know I was always opposed to that fatal marriage.”

“Don’t speak ill of Guy, Tom! Don’t; I can’t bear it.”

“But I must speak ill of him; every honest man must speak ill of him; and to think that we should be mixed up with such people!”

“Ah, Tom, do stop. I am so glad you are alive and well, and come home again to take care of us.”

“All that depends upon yourself, Alice; but if you hope for my protection and countenance, you must renounce——”

“Yes, Tom, dear;” and Alice’s face momentarily awoke to a little hope and pleasure.

“I came here at a good deal of expense and trouble to myself,” said Vincent.

“It was very kind of you, Tom.”

“I should think it was,” said Vincent, drawing himself up. “I have made a little money——”

“Yes!”

“A little money, and having worked hard for it, I have a right to enjoy it.”

"Of course you have, Tom."

"But I will do something for you, on certain conditions."

"I will do whatever you like."

"I see you are in great misery."

"Yes, Tom, dear."

"Starving and destitute."

"Neither, Mr. Vincent," I interrupted; "your sister and niece want for nothing."

"Then why—why is my sister in this condition! dressed like—yes, dressed like a pauper?"

"She dresses to suit her own wishes."

"Impossible; no woman wishes to be a dowdy."

"But, Tom, dear, I don't care a bit how I am dressed; we have had such trouble, and I promised Guy——"

"Don't name the dishonest villain," shouted Vincent. "Once for all, Alice, renounce him for ever, and I will take you and the child away, and provide for you respectably. It will be at great

sacrifice ; still, I will do it—yes, I will do it,” and he threw out his right hand in a theatrical style.

“ Tom !”

“ Don’t you understand me ?”

“ Yes, yes, I understand you.”

“ You will fulfil my wishes ?”

“ No, no,” cried Alice, starting up, “ I am sorry you are my brother ; you have no heart ; you are a bad man ! Don’t marry Tom, Rachel !”

“ You are quite an idiot, Alice ! who talks of marriage ?” exclaimed Vincent, evidently more alive to the fear that I might lay some claim to him, than sensible of his sister’s reproaches.

“ Fear not, Mr. Vincent,” said I, quietly ; “ I do not think you are in any danger from me.”

How strange that, in a moment of the greatest excitement, one’s mind can receive an impression of the ludicrous. I verily believe Mr. Vincent’s thoughts were absorbed in the fear that the honour he had once done me, might lead to presumptuous hopes in me for the future. Few things

are more thoroughly laughable than a man who lives habitually on the defensive against matrimonial speculations ; few, indeed, unless it be one who is ensnared by a skilful manœuvre at the moment when he is parrying the supposed aim of her who despises the conquest too much to attempt it.

“ I once loved you, Miss Arden,” said Vincent ; “ but—”

“ And prescribed for me, too, and took my fee, Mr. Vincent. Was it not enough ?”

“ Miss Arden !”

“ Nay, Mr. Vincent, I am as good at business as you were then, or are now. I know the value of money, and understand safe investments ; but observe, I am prudent ; my income is nearly double what it was. I am no brilliant speculator, but should I ever invest in any untried enterprise, it must be with a view to assured profits. Frankly, I have no intention of setting my cap at you : to express myself so that you may quite understand me, it would not ‘ pay ’ !”

"Miss Arden!" repeated Vincent, almost admiringly.

"Mr. Vincent, let us keep to business. I am Alice's guardian, virtually. You have made money—will it not be convenient to you to restore that six thousand pounds?"

"That six thousand pounds?" he repeated, musingly. "But you said that you had doubled your capital, Miss Arden! Your income then, is——"

"It is five hundred and seventy five pounds, Mr. Vincent, if you wish to know. The knowledge is at your service."

"Five hundred and seventy five pounds! Miss Arden—"

"Mr. Vincent!"

"There is nothing like domestic life, after all."

"Nothing."

"Settling down quietly and comfortably, after battling the world, a cozy chair each side of the fire-place, a good talk over old times, communion of thought and feeling, and—and interest."

"Mr. Vincent, your picture grows touching ;
to what does this tend ?"

"Can you not guess ?"

"I would rather you told me the riddle's
meaning."

"It means that—that, as I once said before,
we had better get married, and defy the world !"

"You mean, we had better become partners ?"

"Exactly so."

"That is, I bring the capital represented by
£575 a year into the firm ; and you—how much
would you bring ?"

"Oh, somewhat less, somewhat less—say £340.
Very nice, put together. Let me see ; ought and
five's five, four and seven's eleven, one and three's
four and five's nine ; yes, £915 a year ; what do
you say ?"

"Say ? well, I scarcely think the bargain fair."

"Not fair, Miss Arden ?"

"No ; partners should be equal. So I thank
you ; and, after all, you would sell yourself
cheaply. I like fair trade, Mr. Vincent ; and

with your dashing spirit, and knowledge of the world, you might get more."

"Dear me, Miss Arden, how funny you are; you always were funny."

"Possibly; but I like to speak my mind. When you came in here, Mr. Vincent, or shortly after, you stood on the defensive, though I had not the least idea of an attack on your liberty; some glamour has since turned you into a—what shall I call it? a lover? no. But no matter; I once more decline the honour you would do me, and thank you most sincerely for diverting my mind in a way I never thought it could be diverted. But touching that six thousand pounds?"

"Alice has no legal claim on me that I should beggar myself for her; but I repeat, if she will give up that villain——"

"What villain?"

"Guy Rolfe; you must think of him as I do?"

"Not exactly," said I, coolly; "but I do not think it matters much."

"What?"

"Your opinion of Guy Rolfe. You shall have some supper, Mr. Vincent, and if Alice continues so blind to her interests, as to keep faithful to her husband in his misery——"

"What then, Miss Arden?"

"I will keep faithful to her, that's all."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE RIVER OF LIFE FLOWS ON.

YOUNG Alice was a beautiful creature at fifteen, tall and fair, well-featured, and well-formed, with a certain grace that came rather from nature than from training. Good tempered, high spirited, with a dash of romance, that was almost poetry in her composition, affectionate and kind, but withal a little spoilt and selfish.

It had been one of the great studies of my life for many years to teach her the earnest thing that life is, and the beauty and holiness of its duties. Sometimes I dreamt that I might rear her into so noble a woman that, if ever Guy came home, to live down the blot upon his once fair

name, she might be the support and solace of his days ; and she had so many good impulses, could show such thoughtful kindness sometimes, with so sweet a grace, that she inspired me with a thousand pleasant hopes. She waited assiduously on the dear old man, and on her mother, and was my aid in many ways ; but it sometimes happened that a fit of laziness and selfishness came upon her, and then she put my happy dreams to flight. By great care we, or rather I, had succeeded in keeping the story of her father's condemnation from her ; she knew that he was abroad, that some great sorrow had sent him there ; she heard dark hints dropped by poor Alice's wandering incoherent words ; she saw her grandfather bowed down more by a fixed grief than by years ; and me she saw almost always grave, if not sad ; but her buoyant spirit rose above all, as a lark above earth-mists, and she was happy.

It was a great thing to have that bright, young creature moving among us like a sunbeam, in the

solemn gloom of our lives; it was sweet to hear her carol forth songs like a blackbird's note. I listened to her sometimes till my eyes filled with tears, half pleasure, half pain. Sometimes she won a smile even from her grandfather, but from her mother, never.

As for Alice, she had outlived all her beauty; she grew heavy and stout, and sat silent, with closed eyes, for hours, looking older than her years, hating to be alone, yet never joining in anything that went on around her.

For myself, the glass told me that I was still recognizable. I had never had much beauty to lose; thin and pale, and large-eyed, I had always been, and such I was still, only a few added lines on my forehead, a few scattered untimely silver hairs, marked a change in me.

Young Alice came to my room one day, and caught me shedding tears over some reliques of the past, which lay before me in an open drawer—some withered flowers and faded hair, and scraps of pale writing, and the many worthless treasures

that all true women hoard up, and idolize in secret.

"Aunt, what are you doing ?" I was shutting up my treasures hastily. "Who is that ?" exclaimed the girl, seizing on a photograph. "My brother," I answered.

"I did not know you had one."

"You know it now then, child," said I, vexed at her perseverance.

"Aunt, the house is full of mystery."

"So is life, Alice."

"I am no longer a child ; tell me what it is ?"

"The mystery of life, God only can explain."

"True ; but why do we live so unlike other people ? If I laugh, you look solemn ; if I sing, you sigh. What is it ? why is it ?"

"Alice, the world is full of sorrow."

"The sky is full of clouds, but there are bright bits between, aunt !"

"And there are bright bits of life, too, Alice ; you are having them now. Bless God, and be happy."

“ But, Aunt, I must know. Why is my mother so sad ?”

“ She has had sorrows.”

“ Very likely, but her sorrow seems despair ; and my grandfather, what makes him wretched ? I think I can guess. My father is away all these years, but why—why ? Is he never coming home ?”

“ Yes, please God, some day.”

“ Why did he go ? why does he stay ? I asked my grandfather, he told me to come to you.”

“ Alice !” I cried, in something like bitterness of spirit, “ do you want to put the sunshine out of your life ? Are you tired of joy ?”

“ No, aunt, but I want to know the truth, all the truth.”

“ Someone has been talking to you.”

“ Perhaps they have.”

“ What then ?”

“ I would wish to know if I have a right to resent insult, or am I to bow down to it ? Aunt,

aunt, am I to blush for my father, or be proud of him?"

Then I told her of the robbery, the accusation, the condemnation. She listened in silence, clasping her hands tightly together, while her eyes dilated, and her little head shook up and down slowly, as if she kept time to my words.

"So that is the skeleton in our home!" she exclaimed, "that is why my grandfather and my mother and you always look like people just come home from a funeral; these sort of things are never got over, I suppose? They go on, until the third and fourth generation. I am what the Hindoos call their outcasts, a pariah. Aunt! aunt! I had romantic dreams until to-day!"

"You had?"

"Yes; but my fairy castles have all toppled down—all, all; and now it seems to me that the one business of my life will be to learn, did he do it?"

"Does nothing in your own heart answer the

doubt, Alice? Look on this, and say, is this the face of a criminal?"

"Ah, that is my father, then?"

"Yes, and a faithful likeness."

"Aunt! aunt! may I have it?"

I hesitated a minute, but then put it in her hand; his child had more right to it than I.

"Why was he condemned?" sobbed Alice.

"He gave himself up to justice, because he was responsible for the loss."

"And he did not do it; you are sure he did not do it?"

"Sure as I am that God's mercy is over all his works."

"I, too, shall grow old now," said Alice.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHAT THE FRESH TIDE BROUGHT.

"I SHALL be home in six months," said Guy's last, brief letter, "and I have resolved to come straight to Warford, and with God's help to begin life anew, if I do it as a field labourer. The days God gives us are solemn things, they are best spent in work, from the morning light to the evening shadows ; happy they who look to the Eternal Father for his verdict and live above that of man."

"If we could only go away," said Alice, shuddering, "go away where no one could know us, and change our names."

"Change our names?" said the father, waking up, "change our names? never! never!"

"But we might move away to Wales, or Scotland, or anywhere," murmured Alice.

"No!" thundered the old man, for a moment looking his own self. "Here the slandrous lie was hatched, here we take our stand till the truth comes out of darkness; come forth it must, as God is just."

"Oh dear! Oh dear! please don't be angry, Mr. Rolfe. Do just what you like, I dare say we shall get accustomed to it, and people must forget all about it some day, and when Guy comes home it will be all right. You know he said it was quite proper he should go; and it's all over now."

"It will never be over, never!" groaned young Alice, "no, not when my hair is as white as my grandfather's. I do wish we could go away. Let us emigrate to America, anywhere, rather than be outcasts here, for we are outcasts; even the few who pity us, look down on the convict's family."

“Silence girl!” said her grandfather sternly.
“The time will come when men will look up to
your father and my son!”

“Oh, pray stop, my head feels so bad,” said
the mother; “it’s all very well for you to talk,
child, you that never felt trouble.”

“Trouble! is it none, mother, to be ashamed
of my name?”

“Silence!” once more cried the old man,
starting up and quivering all over.

“God help me,” muttered young Alice, “you
all seem to think that no one feels, or suffers,
but yourselves.”

“I don’t, child,” I whispered. “I know it is
a terrible thing to have a cloud hanging over a
young life like yours, but I want to make you
understand that it is more terrible still to others,
than to you; you have youth and hope now, and
in the days to come will have love and all good
things—they have only sad memories.”

“Aunt Rachel, aunt Rachel! are you made
of marble?”

"No," said Mr. Rolfe, "she is made of the stuff of which God makes his saints and martyrs."

I did not take the old man's praise without a blush, still it was soothing to feel how I had won my way into his heart—a heart once so stern and closed to others.

"I should think it was I that was the martyr," groaned Alice, sitting all the while with her hands clasping the top of her head, adding—

"Oh how selfish people are!" Mr. Rolfe was again immersed in the book he had been holding, "Thomas à Kempis," perhaps he had been reading the passage, "Talk not much with women, for with them is foolishness," but now and then he cast his eyes with a vexed look on his daughter-in-law.

"I meant no harm, Aunt Rachel," said the girl, drawing me into another room, "I know you are very good to us all, and that makes half my misery; but you are not of our wretched blood after all, the shame is not yours, you cannot

feel as I do. You talk of love and happiness in the future for me, I know there are no such things before me."

"Why should there not be?"

"Who would marry a convicted felon's daughter? Ah I see you don't like me to use those words, but after all, it is best to call things by their right names. Aunt Rachel, my grandfather is the only one who speaks out plainly about my father, as if he thought him innocent ; my mother says nothing ; you don't go beyond saying he did not do it, you bring no proofs."

"Wait God's time for proofs, Alice, meanwhile, have faith. Your mother knows the truth."

"Yet says nothing!"

"She is broken in health and spirit."

"Aunt, you may have that photograph back again."

"Your father's?"

"Yes, I was eager to have it, but it makes me wretched whenever I look on it."

"Oh Alice, Alice!"

"I can't help it, Aunt Rachel, and I repeat, you cannot tell what a sorrow like mine is."

"Well, child, be it so ; give me back the photo. I shall value it as it deserves. Now let us talk of other things."

"Yes, let us talk of something else. Aunt, do you know what has come into my mind ?"

"Indeed I can't tell."

"You know I am naturally romantic, or sentimental, whichever it is ?"

"More romantic than sentimental, Alice."

"Well, I have got rid of all that."

"How ?"

"Oh, it died a sudden death, just as if it had been shot, or stabbed, it died directly I heard that story, and something else has grown up in its place."

"What is that ?"

"Common sense, I think : you would call it calculation ! "

"To what does this lead, Alice ?"

"You will see. I have no money, aunt."

“ You have none now.”

“ No name to boast, no talents, nothing but an ordinary pretty face.”

“ If it were thus ?”

“ Well, there is no love worth the name in store for me.”

“ I believe there is.”

“ But I know there is not. Frankly, my aim is to escape from here at any risk, at any cost.”

“ Alice ! Alice !”

“ I can’t help it, aunt. I believe no man worthy my regard would have me ; if I have an offer from any one, no matter whom, I will accept it, provided he will take me away from Warford.”

“ And seal your own misery ! ”

“ I cannot be more miserable than I am ; if you felt half my wretchedness, you would enter into my motives and feelings.”

“ What is to become of your mother ? ”

“ I have confidence that you will never forsake her.”

“And your father, if he find your place empty when he comes home?”

“He cannot miss one he scarcely knew; besides, I should sadden instead of cheering him. Aunt Rachel, I must take my own way.”

“Own way often leads wrong, Alice.”

“You have had yours, aunt.”

“You think so, because you don’t know the history of my heart but never mind, Alice, about that, I would rather talk of you now. I own I thought you would be the comfort of that sorrowful life.”

“Aunt, I have not the self-denial that daily martyrdom calls for. I was eager for happiness, the cup has been dashed from my lips; my only aim now is to escape disgrace, or rather to hide the shame that blights my name. If any one will help me to do that, be he a hoary-headed man of seventy winters, I will thankfully follow him away, the farther off the better, even were it to the world’s end.”

CHAPTER XXIV.**IN THE OLD CHURCH.**

MR. ROLFE and I were kneeling in the old church, in the old spot; the two Alices were at home. It was in the grey light of evening, and a soft summer wind swayed the branches to and fro against the windows, while in by the open porch came the scent of the flowers that pious hands had reared on the quiet graves.

The same old white-haired man that had prayed and preached to us in old years, prayed and preached to us now; he was whiter, and stooped more, and his voice was more tremulous, still it was the same; and many a long year did

it carry me back, when he gave out the text, "Strangers and Pilgrims." I wonder whether anyone but myself remembered that sermon, and knew that the preacher had brought it forth from some dusty closet, where it had lain forgotten for years.

Perhaps no one but myself remembered having heard it in the dead time.

It was that evening that Warburton had suddenly appeared, bringing with him such dreams of golden romance.

How freshly it all came back ! How I marvelled at my own dead follies and weakness, and tried to fix my mind upon the holy words, and yet each one served as a stimulus to memory. It almost seemed that if I looked up I should see Elmore facing me, as in that old time.

But no, in the place where he had sat was a stranger with iron-grey hair, who shaded his face with his hand, and seemed to give wrapt attention to the sermon ; only now and then he glanced across at the altar, near which we were seated.

By and by, we heard the solemn words softly sung, "Abide with me, fast falls the even-tide," then we walked forth and went down the path, upon which night shadows were already falling.

"Strangers and pilgrims," repeated Mr. Rolfe, as he leant heavily on my arm; "but rest will come some day." "Truly it will come," I answered, "and how much sweeter will it be for the very toil and sadness of the pilgrimage! Faith unto death brings the crown."

"Rachel, I would have you call me father; I like to fancy you are my daughter."

"And I like to be your daughter; my life is yours while God spares me."

"Are you quite sure of that, Rachel?" said a well-known voice, from some one who had been following us, and the stranger with iron-grey hair stood in front of me and barred my path. "Are you quite sure that you are free to dispose of your liberty?"

"Warburton!"

"Myself, Rachel, though externally changed.

I have hastened on to age, you have stood still.
How unaltered you are! Will you give me your
hand? will you say you forgive me?"

"What shall I forgive?"

"My unkind silence."

"Perhaps the fault was mine?"

"No, no, all my own. Rachel, I grew into a wretched worldling; I tried to live for the world, to substitute gauds for a true jewel, but, if it is any expiation, I have been sorely punished. Rachel, I have never seen the woman that could take your place in my heart. A dozen times some fair phantom has lured me into false worship, but the shrines have all crumbled down. I come back to my haven of rest, half-hopeful, half fearing to ask—is it mine still?"

"Warburton, when we parted, what did I promise you?"

"To be my wife the moment I could claim you!"

"Have you released me from that pledge?"

"Never."

“One question more: am I necessary to your happiness?”

“More than you ever were.”

I think the hand that I put in Elmore’s was cold as that of the dead, the blood within me seemed to freeze, and I trembled violently.

“I think I will go on,” said Mr. Rolfe, sighing heavily; “you young people want to talk, no doubt. This is a strange business, Mr. Elmore, a very strange one, but I suppose Rachel knows what she is about,” and he walked away with more vigour than I could have expected.

“Strange to him, doubtless,” said Elmore, as he drew my arm through his; “strange it will seem to all, they will not understand us, Rachel, how can they? Do you know that it is twelve years to-day since we stood in this village path together, when, unable to do without you any longer, I followed you down from London; but it seems only yesterday, Rachel, only yesterday! And you have been faithful—your pledge unbroken!”

“ Unbroken, if you wish it so, Warburton, but remember I am no longer young !”

“ You will always be young to me.”

“ I can bring you but little means. I must provide for my god-child.”

“ What god-child ?”

“ Alice Rolfe.”

“ Oh ! yes, of course, poor child, but, Rachel, don’t talk to me of means. I have all we can want. I would rather you brought me nothing ; what is money between us ?”

And truly it was nothing ; as I looked into Warburton’s face I saw that he meant all he said, and more. He had a real affection for me, he was worthier of a woman’s love than he had ever been before ; but I did not love him, I could not, and I looked forward to redeeming my pledge with an aching heart ; still I would redeem it.

CHAPTER XXV.

A POET'S FANCY.

THE woman who can retain a poet's wandering fancy must be something very remarkable. I knew but one poet, and perhaps I was wrong in taking him as a type of all, but it seemed to me that he would fulfil the old words—

“The Fates have destined me to rove
A long, long pilgrimage of love;
And many an altar on my way
Hath lured my pious steps to stray:
For if the saint was young and fair,
I turned and sang my vespers there.”

I well understood that Elmore spoke literally, saying that a dozen times fair phantoms had lured him to her shrine. His character was

essentially weak and impressionable, but he was a man who had too refined a taste for his imagination to lead him into grave error. When I saw him in broad day-light, he was even greyer than he had appeared in the uncertain evening light, but he seemed otherwise very unchanged ; it was certainly a wonderfully beautiful face, luminous with expression ; such a face is dangerous to women, reflecting as it does every shade of sensibility. His voice was singularly musical, and carried with it such persuasion, that I well understood how he had captivated my young fancy. But I was a staid woman now, fast advancing to middle life, with a dead heart and a chastened mind ; it did not seem that I had any right to the dangerous inheritance of such a man's affection ; and how could I be sure to retain it ? If we married, I might depend upon his kindness and fidelity in act, but in heart—over that he would himself have no control. A profound melancholy seized me, but I did my best to conceal it, and waited for God's will concerning me.

Alice never saw the face of a stranger who entered the house nor did Mr. Rolfe, while the young girl carefully hid herself the moment a visitor appeared.

Thus Elmore saw me only when he came, and each time he saw me he urged me to hurry my preparations for a final departure from Warford.

He had leave of absence for some time from India, but wished to spend the greater part of it in European travel; I was to see places and things of which I had only dreamed, and now seldom thought. Warburton talked more charmingly than ever, but the spell was broken for me, the glamour dead.

He came to see me daily, I always welcomed him, never shortened his visit, yet when it was over, I felt sensibly relieved.

Mr Rolfe was, I could see, vexed in spirit, and preserved a distant offended manner, but said nothing; Alice lamented bitterly, but was somewhat comforted when I explained to her, as I dared not explain to the dear old man, the pro-

vision I was making for their future benefit and comfort.

Young Alice was restless, melancholy, and silent. One day she sat listlessly on the broad window seat, not exactly looking out, but with fixed eyes that must perforce see, however dimly, what passed. Suddenly she exclaimed "There is some one at the door, I must go." She rose to go out, but Elmore was already in the room. An introduction was inevitable, he gazed on Alice with surprise and admiration, she bowed haughtily and walked through the door, which he held open for her.

"Your god-daughter, of course," said Warburton; "how pretty she is!"

"She is beautiful, we think," I said.

"What a generous creature you are, Rachel, freer from feminine faults than any woman I ever knew in my life."

"You are very kind to say so, Warburton, still I don't see how your remark applies this time."

"Would any one but you keep that fair

young face beside you, and love and appreciate it too?"

"It does not seem strange to me, I have had a mother's care of that child, almost from her birth."

"She looks intelligent as well as beautiful."

"She is so, she has very good abilities."

"Rachel!"

"Yes?"

"I have a bright idea."

"Have you? Impart it quickly then."

"Is she amiable?"

"Well, that word hardly describes Alice, but her heart is in the right place, and she has many good qualities."

"Rachel!"

"Go on, Warburton!"

"You and I might, for age, be that girl's parents!"

"Certainly we might."

"Let us adopt her, take her with us to India; her fair face, her young spirit, will light up our

bungalow. She will be your companion when I am absent, and we can give her our own name."

"Oh, Warburton!"

"You surely don't object, Rachel?"

"For myself, no, God knows; but I am thinking of the poor souls she would leave behind."

"The old man's career is nearly ended, I should say."

"Her mother!"

"Her mother, Rachel, had nothing more than the life of a flower formerly, I dare say it is little beyond that of a vegetable now."

"I will speak to Alice," said I. Of Guy I said nothing; it seemed tacitly understood between Warburton and me, that he should not be referred to at all.

"You mean the girl?"

"I meant her mother, but I will speak to both."

"By the way, I must tell you something, Rachel. I said you were generous. I must pay

you another compliment, you have more insight than anyone."

"How do you know, Warburton?"

"You remember Mrs. Cheveley?"

"Indeed I do. She was not one to be forgotten by man, or woman."

"All you said of her was true."

"I think it was," said I; still I did not ask how he had become convinced of the fact.

"I met her in Calcutta," he continued, "she is living there now. Did you know she had returned to India?"

"I knew it; I saw her name in the list of passengers shortly after you left England."

"And you said nothing about it in your letters?"

"Why should I? I thought that if you had anything to tell, you would say so. I did not want to question you."

"Rachel!"

"Go on."

"I had nothing to do with that woman's voyage."

"I never thought you had."

"But I—I should like to tell you everything."

"Just as you please."

"Do you wish to hear?"

"Of course, if you wish to tell."

"Well, then, she was one of my earliest and most intimate acquaintances in India, and I acknowledge to you that she quite captivated me."

"It was natural, she is very beautiful."

"She was beautiful; now she is a wreck."

"Indeed! I thought she would wear well."

"Why should she?"

"Because she felt so little; and in her case the body would never sue the mind for damages."

"True, as a companion she soon wearied me; and, what was worse, I discovered how hollow was the heart within; anything more artful and

designing than Mrs. Cheveley I never knew; anything so utterly heartless, I hope never to meet again. Do you know, Rachel, she meant to marry me?"

"Yes, I knew it, but how is it she did not succeed?"

"I had a little remnant of honour left, I could not have married while you were free."

"How did you know I was unmarried?"

"Because I had never given you back your pledge; because I believed your honour."

"Thank you. I am glad you believe in a woman's honour."

"I continued to visit Mrs. Cheveley for two years."

"For two years?"

"Yes, then I found that as I had not made an offer, I was what the Italians call 'Il patito,' and had two rivals at once. I fancy she was as tired of me as I of her."

"And now?"

"Well, now she is grey and wrinkled; her

nose and chin hold close communion; she has grown thin and scraggy; ill-temper and peevishness have replaced her vivacity—she outwitted herself, and is still Mrs. Cheveley.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

CHANGE.

HAS the reader anticipated what I am about to tell? I think not quite. It is no tale of a faithless lover, nor yet of a treacherous rival. I think I had no just cause of complaint; I know I felt no resentment, and could lay no claim to the martyr's palm, though once more the crown was taken from my head—or rather I voluntarily laid it down, sooner than wear faded flowers wet with other's tears.

In a few words, I told Alice of Warburton's proposition with regard to her child.

"It cannot be," said Alice promptly, "who

is to take care of me if you both go? You know, Rachel, I can't be left."

"What is all this?" asked Mr. Rolfe.

I explained in a few words.

"It must not be thought of," said the old man quickly. "The girl's duty is at home."

"I knew you would say so," said Alice. "You know how much I want somebody to help me, and wait on me; but young people are so selfish."

All this while the younger Alice stood near, clasping her hands together till the nails seemed to press into the flesh, and compressing her lips; while her face was flushed, and her eyes unnaturally bright. Presently she came round her mother's chair, and stood in front of her, bending down a little, but still tightly pressing her hands together. For a minute she was silent; then said,—

"Mother; let me go!"

"You wicked, cruel girl! It is shameful in Mr. Warburton to propose it."

"It is most noble in him to propose it," exclaimed the girl, flushing crimson. "He is the most generous, self-forgetting man in the wide world; and I would willingly be his slave. I would lay down my life for him!"

"You had much better lay down your pride and selfishness, young madam, and do your duty at home," cried the grandfather, rising in haste, and pacing the room.

"There; I knew what your grandfather would say," repeated Alice. "Young people should think about others."

"You don't understand me—none of you understand me!" cried young Alice, with a passionate burst of tears, and rushing from the room.

"Heartless! Heartless as a stone!" said Mr. Rolfe.

"Let us say no more about it," I interposed. "Warburton meant well; but I see it can't be."

"Of course not," said Alice sharply; "I can't be left by both of you at once—you know I can't."

But oh ! dear Rachel ! I do wish you had never thought about going ; then, I could have parted with the child, if I had had you to do things for me !”

“ But then she could not have gone, you know ?”

“ No : of course not ; but she would have married so well ! It seems very hard, very hard indeed.”

No doubt it did seem hard to Alice that I, a woman no longer young, should marry and begin a life of prosperity as the wife of a distinguished man, while her beautiful young daughter might live and die in the shadow of a sin that was not hers. I knew, too, that the girl did not wholly think of securing her own ease and happiness by going with us ; she thought chiefly of escaping the curse upon her name. I found her kneeling by her bedside, her whole frame shaken by sobs, and quite spirit-broken. I laid my hand on her head ; she started and looked up.

“Aunt Rachel, I am a wretched girl—wicked and selfish I know.”

“We are all wicked in one sense, Alice.”

“True; but I am very vile. I see it—I know it; and perhaps, in the end, he would think so too.”

“Who would think so, too?”

“Mr. Elmore. Please tell him I have given up my selfish happiness, and am going to stay at home. But you won’t let him think me ungrateful, too, will you? Oh, how happy you are, Aunt Rachel! how happy you are!”

“Do you think so?”

“I am sure you are; you will see him every day; hear his beautiful thoughts; listen to his words, and—”

“I am not quite sure of that, Alice. God only knows what is between us and the sunset of life. Now pray, I beseech you, and then sleep—prayer and sleep are blessed things. Prayer brings God’s angels near, and then we sleep under their wings.”

I went to my own little study, where I was wont to pray and think and lay plans. Twilight was round me, and shadows were falling on my mother's empty chair, which I had kept so long as a precious relic. I knelt down before it, and I could almost fancy, as I looked up, that the pale meek face was there before me,—serious, but serenely happy. The vision became so real, that I cried, as though I had really knelt before her,—

“Mother! what would you have me do?”

“Mr. Elmore, ma'am,” said the servant. I rose in haste as he entered.

Never had I seen Elmore so tenderly affectionate in manner. He deferred to everything I said; but asked if I could not be ready the following week. The shadows grew deeper; but the moon rose, and showed me that he looked both pale and sad. Then I told him that Alice could not go with us.

“Was it her own decision?” he asked quickly.

“At last, it was.”

“Did she really wish to go, then?”

“Yes, at first ; but she gave up afterwards. I was to tell you of her gratitude, that you might not misinterpret her motives.”

“Her gratitude,” he paused. “Ah, well,” he added ; “I believe she is quite right, after all ; the responsibility would be too great for me—for us both. Yet, poor child, there is wretchedness before her !”

“She will marry,” I suggested.

“Marry !” he repeated with a sudden start. “Oh, yes, of course ; I had forgotten that. But let us get away as soon as we can ; this place is as sad as a sepulchre. Why do you look so searchingly at me, Rachel ?”

“I want to know you thoroughly, Warburton.”

“Don’t you know me already ?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“What am I then ?”

“A poet.”

“Pshaw ; I am tired of that. What else ?”

“A kind heart, that would not willingly inflict a pang on a worm.”

"Indeed I would not ; and oh, Rachel ! the whole happiness of my life lies in your hands."

"The trust shall be sacred, Warburton," I answered ; "and now good night. If there is to be a wedding so soon, I must have a little time, you know."

I went with him through the garden, to let him out by a side door. Suddenly a slight sound made us both turn round ; we looked up, a curtain of one of the upper windows was a little drawn back, and a young face, in a cluster of falling hair, was seen for a moment, then as hastily withdrawn. Neither of us spoke, but we stood still and looked at one another, till Elmore's eyes fell, while he sighed heavily.

"Rachel, don't judge me hardly, I am not a villain."

"I know you are not. Come to-morrow at seven, Warburton ; we will then have a long talk, and——"

"You believe that your happiness is my first object ?"

"I do ; and I am not ungrateful. Now farewell, or the moon will scarcely light you home."

I sat down when he was gone, on the old rustic seat on which I had so often dreamed, and shed a few quiet tears—half sadness, half relief—for my resolution was taken ; if my own life was to be shadowy still, I would not mar the sunshine of others. The poet was but a poet, and the young girl in her first dream of hero worship ; what was I, that I should judge either hardly ? I went in and walked quietly up to young Alice's room. She lay on her bed apparently sleeping ; but I saw that her lips and eye-lids were quivering, and tears lay under the lashes.

I had trodden in so noiselessly, that she was not disturbed. Presently she murmured some words which I could not help hearing, and from which I gathered that a few weeks' familiar intercourse with Elmore had put to flight all prudential calculations, and that Alice was truly in love—hopelessly, despairingly. Still she had

no thought of rivalling me, and hoped to nurse her young romance in secret.

The next evening Warburton came as appointed. I forestalled what he would have said, by saying,—

“I have no reproaches for you, Warburton. Your error, if it be one, is involuntary—you are free !”

“Rachel, don’t desert me ; though I merit it, if ever man did.”

“I don’t desert you ; we shall always be friends. But I read your heart, and I have read Alice’s.”

“Alice’s !”

“Yes ; you love her—she loves you. I will not stand in your sunshine.”

“She loves me ! Impossible.”

“True, however ; and I repeat, you are free to be happy.”

“Rachel ! recall your words. Don’t make of me a dishonourable scoundrel.”

“If I release you, there is no dishonour in the matter.”

“And do you think I could be happy, leaving you in sadness behind? Do you think I have neither honour nor conscience left?”

“I think no harm of you, Warburton; I exonerate you entirely. I am sure of her mother’s consent; all I ask of you is to await her father’s return.”

Elmore was silent, standing with his arms folded on his bosom, and his head bent down. At last he looked up and said,—

“Rachel, be frank with me—answer me one question. Is not the extraordinary overture you have made me partly to release yourself?”

“I never thought of it, Warburton.”

“Of what then did you think?”

“Of your happiness and Alice’s.”

“Nothing shall tempt me to sacrifice you, Rachel.”

“But if I tell you that it is no sacrifice?”

"It would give me a bitter pang."

"Then I must give it you, Warburton, for your own sake, for the poor child's. I tell you that the love I had for you is all dead and buried, there is a garland on its grave, but still the life is gone."

"And you would have married me?"

"Yes and been a good wife to you."

"Why? why?"

"Because you told me I was necessary to your happiness, because I believe a solemn promise binds a woman as much as a man."

"Rachel, do with me what you will; but never, never shall I know such companionship as yours."

My way lay plainly before me. I had no difficult task in winning the fair young bride for Elmore, no trouble in bringing the mother to consent, directly she was made to understand that I should remain to watch over her comforts.

I again stipulated that the wedding should await Guy's presence, but Alice produced an old

letter of his in which he said that his child's happiness was dearer to him than his peace, which she interpreted as her wishes dictated, and urged on the marriage.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WEDDING.

It is strange how, after a very decided act, which seems exactly the right thing at the moment, we sometimes begin to doubt what we have done, and to wonder whether the issue will justify our judgment, or satisfy our conscience.

I had no sooner planned and settled everything for the wedding, than my heart misgave me. Would the child be happy? would the poet of the wandering fancy, be faithful? beyond all, would Guy be satisfied? would he ask his child from my hands as a pledge I was bound to restore? I had many an hour of depression and perplexity

with no one to share my mental struggles. The mother was both pleased and satisfied; Mr. Rolfe was more contented than I could have supposed.

Young Alice was radiant, and Elmore, quieter than I had ever known him as if sobered, and perhaps a little ashamed of his happiness. I sometimes caught him watching me very intently; I fancy he wanted to feel sure whether my renunciation was in good faith. It is, I think, always rather difficult for a man thoroughly to believe that his reign is quite over; and when he is at length convinced of the fact, there is a good deal of regret, if not of bitterness, attending the conviction.

I saw that Elmore had not yet reached the certainty that was desirable on the subject, so I did my best to help him to arrive at the conclusion, and to make him understand that I was entirely disenchanted of romance, I put forward my business qualities.

When he said suddenly to me one day, "Of what are you thinking, Rachel?" I answered

quickly, "Of the money market—I often dabble in the stocks?"

"For amusement, or excitement?"

"No, to improve my means; by-the-by, I want you to insure your life."

"My life, Rachel?"

"Yes, for Alice."

"Dear Heaven! are you speculating how long I have to live?"

"Not quite, Warburton, but life is always insecure; the premium is of course higher for Indians than—"

"Rachel! Rachel!"

"Well, my friend?"

"Ah, I know that you have made no sacrifice!"

"I am glad you know it at last."

"Well I will insure if you like," he answered, with a little bitter smile; "but let us see what Alice says to it; here she is.—Shall I insure my life for your benefit, little one?"

"For my benefit! cruel! cruel!" cried Alice,

growing quite pale. "Don't you know that if you died, I must die too?"

Here I thought it prudent to beat a retreat, and on my way to the garden I met Mr. Rolfe, who joined me.

"Are you quite satisfied with what I have done?" I asked him.

"Yes dear, quite, and thank God I feel more peace than I have known for a long while. The child will be happy in her way, her pride will cease to be hurt, and—well I think he will be kind to her—don't you think he will?"

"Yes, I am sure he will be kind."

"There's a 'dreadful difference in years, though!'"

"Too much I fear; but Warburton is so young for his age; he has such lively feelings, so much imagination."

"That's the worst of it, Rachel! Lively feelings, imagination, won't that lead to—to what it has already brought."

"Inconstancy you mean. Indeed, I hope and believe Alice is quite safe, her youth and beauty will still be fresh when he has grown really old, if a poet ever does grow old!"

"But how can a girl of that age be a companion to such a man?"

"An ordinary girl could not, but she is not an ordinary girl, she is full of intelligence and enthusiasm."

"Rachel, will you mind telling me one thing?"

"I will tell you anything you like, Mr Rolfe—father, I mean," I added, for lately he would have me so call him.

"How did you get over your fondness for—" and he hesitated.

For a moment I hesitated too, but he continued to look the question his words left incomplete, so I answered, "I think my imagination loved him, not my heart; the love of the imagination can be torn up like trailing wild flowers, though the heart's love is as hard to uproot as a forest tree."

"Rachel, it is you who are the poet this time!

Let me lean on you my dear, I am not strong today. Do you know he will be home in six months?"

"Guy!"

"Yes, and God has given me a good hope that when he comes, we shall be able to unravel this horrible mystery, I fancy I see a loophole to—"

I looked fixedly at him, and his eyes looked straight into mine.

"Rachel, we will drag it to light! and you will help the work. Guy's presence will be necessary, but much can be done before he arrives. I have overheard something, something important; you must know my thoughts, you must share them!"

I felt myself growing pale, and turned quite faint.

"It is no use keeping silence any longer, directly the wedding is over, we must both speak out."

"Hush! hush! for pity's sake!" I exclaimed, sinking on a bench. "I promised, I swore to Guy to be silent, I cannot break the vow."

"Well, one thing you can do, put no obstacle in the way of a speedy wedding!"

"But if Guy asks for his child?"

"I take that responsibility, I will satisfy my son!"

The following week Warburton and Alice were married. The wedding was of course, a very quiet one. Mr. Rolfe gave the bride away, and I represented the mother, who could not attend. No friend of Elmore's was present; he would proudly show his bride afterwards, no doubt, but none, if he could help it, should know her origin, and in this she would carefully aid him.

In the early morning it was all over. I thought, as we knelt in the church, of another wedding there in the old years, and I remembered distinctly every unworthy pang that my heart had then known. Surely if sorrow could expiate sin, the trials that had followed must have absolved me! I think I quite forgot that Warburton had been my lover; my brief romance seemed like a poem read by the fire-light, whose images are effaced

by life's solemn realities, or so shrouded that we only remember them as vague sweet dreams.

Elmore was very serious through the service, and when we went home, while the bride was changing her dress, he startled me by the words that no one had ever used to me but Guy, "Sister Rachel!"

"No, no," I answered laughing, "you must henceforth call me aunt."

Alice knelt down before her mother; whose tears fell silently over her, while the girl clasped both her hands in hers and sobbed, "I am a wicked selfish girl to leave you mother! but I can't help it, you know I can't help it!"

"No, you can't help it, I am quite satisfied, quite happy. Rachel can do all I want. But, child, you should wear your real lace collar and your pretty brooch; there's no harm now, you know, your husband can afford you to be nice!"

"I will send you something from India, mama," said Alice, seeing the turn her mother's thoughts were taking.

" Some Dacca muslin," said she quickly ; then added with a quivering sigh, " no, no, never mind, it is too late for me. I forgot, go now, my child. go, my life is over !"

Elmore led young Alice away, Mr. Rolfe and I followed them to the door.

A hurried farewell, a few broken words of advice, that was perhaps out of place, and as they drove off, I saw poor little Alice throw herself into her husband's arms, in a passionate burst of tears. I knew he would be gentle with that fair young creature, and I turned to Mr. Rolfe to comfort him, but his eyes were dry and glittering, and he muttered, " Now, my work begins."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIGHT OUT OF DARKNESS.

MANY days of deep sadness followed the departure of the bridal party ; it seemed that our last sunbeam had left the house doubly shadowed and lonely. Poor Alice was always suffering, and grew worse day by day. She must have felt the loss of her child deeply, though every now and then a gleam of satisfaction burst through the habitual gloom of her life, when she repeated very emphatically, " Married,—and so well married, too !" And certainly the child was " well married," in the general sense of the word. She would have all her own way, and an almost un-

limited supply of money, and fine dresses, and worldly pleasures, beside what to her better nature must have outweighed all else, a great deal of love and devotion.

"Very beautiful dresses, a really handsome trousseau!" murmured Alice. "I wonder what the lace on that blue silk cost! Rachel is too close in these things."

Then followed sighs that were groans, and sadder and darker words dropped from her, to which I could see that Mr. Rolfe listened eagerly, and many a time he would have questioned her closely, but for my remonstrances and entreaties.

Sometimes I almost lost patience with him, and once he reproached me bitterly, till I exclaimed, "Can't you see that she is dying—slowly but surely dying? For God's sake, Sir, let her last days be in peace!"

"And is the peace—the honor of a noble soul—to be finally wrecked for her?" he asked almost fiercely, as if the worst passions of hu-

manity were aroused within him. “ Does not more than a thousand lives hang on her lips ? ”

“ Only wait ! ” I pleaded. “ Only wait till Guy comes—a little patience for charity sake ; it cannot be long now, and only think how many years we have—”

“ I saw no ray of light then ; now I do see some. Oh, Rachel, it will be too late—you will undo him for ever ! ”

“ Father, I know Guy’s mind in this ; and I think, I know too, what God would have us do.”

“ He is a God of justice ! ”

“ Yet more of love. Let us try to be like him ! ”

“ Rachel ! Rachel ! you are always leaving me alone ! ” cried Alice, feebly from the next room, which she had entered without our hearing.

I hastened to her, and found her deadly pale and very feeble. Had she overheard our words ? I almost feared she had, for she shivered and looked at me so strangely. Then she said,

“ I shall not be long here, Rachel. Have patience with me to the end. You will protect

me, won't you? you are so much stronger than I am. And you promised Guy—you know you promised Guy!"

Then she sank on a sofa, sobbing.

"You must listen to my dream, Rachel; I have had such a strange dream, dear."

"Have breakfast first, Alice. I meant to carry yours to your room; you are not strong enough to come down so early."

"I could not rest, dear, and I don't like to be so much alone; but I don't want to see Mr. Rolfe—can't you keep him from coming in?"

I saw that Mr. Rolfe had passed into his own room again, so I carried his breakfast to him, protesting that the coffee would be cold.

"Only grant me time," I repeated to him soothingly, "I think you will be satisfied, and yet we may be spared the sin of breaking the bruised reed."

I stood beside Alice some time, trying to coax her failing appetite. By and bye she put her cup down.

"It was a very strange dream, Rachel, I dreamt I was all in white—my wedding-dress, you know; but there were little bits of cypresses in among the orange-buds in my wreath, and my bridesmaids stood behind me with black crape veils; it was half a funeral—half a wedding, dear."

"Finish your breakfast, and tell the rest in the garden, Alice."

"Guy was beside me, and he was dressed in mourning; and, Rachel—his face was turned quite away from me, and I was broken-hearted."

"Let us take a turn in the garden, my dear."

She rose feebly to lean on my arm, and we took a little gentle walk up and down the nearest path. It was Alice's last look on the flowers and the skies.

"Take me upstairs, Rachel; I must go to bed till—till I'm stronger."

I led her upstairs, and, undressing her like a child, laid her down. Then she put her arms

round my neck, and, drawing me towards her, whispered faintly,

“That was not all the dream. I dreamt of my wedding presents—a lovely mauve dress, and a lace shawl, and a little jeweller’s case, that I thought had a pair of gold bracelets in it. I opened it, Rachel, and inside there was a pair of—of hand-cuffs !”

She looked in my face like a frightened child, then hid her own in my neck, and suddenly fell back on the pillow in a dead faint. In that moment I remembered, with a shudder, Mr. Rolfe’s words—

“More than a thousand lives hang on her lips !”

The doctor thought very seriously of Alice’s case, and prescribed perfect quiet! Alas! that was not for her. She had a vague, instinctive fear that her days were numbered; and as the great shadow of Eternity drew nearer, one could see her entering in with half weariness, half trembling. I brought our good old clergyman

to see her ; he talked gently and lovingly to her, and prayed. She listened with seeming reverence, but said little or nothing.

Mr. Rolfe was awed too much by the near presence of death to persevere in his attempt to make Alice speak ; but he often repeated to me,—

“ I trust to you, Rachel—I trust to you. Remember what hangs on it ! ”

Sometimes she was silent for hours, only moaning at intervals. She was suffering no pain, she said, and she seemed to know that all that human power could do was done for her.

I never left the room for more than a few minutes at a time. Usually Alice, seeing I was there, was satisfied, and turned her face to the wall.

She was sleeping thus one day when the old clergyman came. I put my finger on my lip, and pointed to an easy-chair the other side of the room. Mr. Fairman took the hint, sat down, and began to read from a book he produced

from his pocket. Presently Alice awoke with a start—

“ Rachel !” I bent over her. “ I have had another dream, and I know by that I am going to—to die !” and her lip trembled and grew white as the sheet. “ Listen, dear, I will tell you all now ; and after, yes, after I am dead, you may tell everybody. But not till I am dead, dear, not till I am dead ! Now lock the door !”

I felt as if I should die myself ; the shock was coming. I had hoped and prayed for the hour of revelation, and believed in it. It had come ; but it was too much. I glanced across the room. I could not speak. There sat Mr. Fairman, somewhat in the shade, with clasped hands and breathless. Then I saw him produce paper and a pencil from his pocket, and he prepared to write on the crown of his hat, moving so noiselessly all the while, and signing to me to keep silence.

I was fearfully divided between anxiety to learn the truth and deep pity for the poor frail

creature before me. I locked the door, forced a little wine on Alice, and knelt down by the bed. It was the most awful moment of my life, I think; the near approach of death could scarcely be more so. She put out her two thin white hands, and made me clasp them in mine; then began her story. It would have been hard to tell which trembled more, the speaker or the listener.

Oh! the horror of that minute! It seemed as if we were about to gain her secret—a dying woman's secret—by treachery. I lifted up my head to speak, to warn her that we were not alone, but the old man caught my eye, and with an imperative gesture commanded silence.

“Rachel, I took that money!”

I had long known that, aye, almost from the first, but involuntarily I started.

“Don't leave me, dear, don't leave me! Guy knows the truth; he knows I did it; but he does not know how! And he has borne my shame, my punishment, all these long years and

said nothing ! Was there ever so good a man as Guy, Rachel ? He will be home soon ; but I shall never see his kind face again. And I have nothing to leave him, nothing—yes, I have,” she added, quickly, “his good name. I can give it him back ; but not till I’m dead, Rachel, not till then.” She sank back exhausted and faint.

“I must send for the doctor,” I exclaimed.

“Useless,” whispered Mr. Fairman. “He would only repeat what I heard he said yesterday, no medicine, but nourishment and a good deal of stimulant. Give her a spoonful of wine, and she will revive.” Presently Alice revived. Mr. Fairman had drawn back to his corner.

“Rachel, I am a wicked woman, very wicked and selfish ; but I had no mother, dear, and my grandfather spoilt me till he died, and I had all my own way. And then I came to poor Tom, and while I was young and pretty he spoilt me, too. Then Guy was so good to me for a long, long while ! But it’s no use going over all that

happened; you know it all—all till the day when the money was stolen. I went to see Guy at the bank, and I teased him for money, and said we had nothing to wear? Then he said he would give me a little, but he was saving to pay his debts. I teased him for more; so he grew cross and angry, and went to get some change. The desk was opened; I lifted the cover, and—and took the notes! But I was so frightened, Rachel, when I had done it; and I didn't know for how much they were, I was so frightened, and I wanted to put them back, but Guy came in and I couldn't, and I thought I should drop down dead. And afterwards I couldn't change them. I saw it was no use to try; and I got no good from them, Rachel, no good at all!" Here she paused again.

All the while the old man went on writing down her words inexorably as fate.

"But you will keep my secret, Rachel; you won't betray me? Promise me!"

"I promise—nay, I swear—that while you

breathe, your secret shall be kept," said I distinctly ; and, in my turn, I gave an imperative look to the secret witness in the corner. " But, Alice, dear, if you told poor Guy part, why not tell him all?"

" I didn't tell him anything, but he knew, somehow ! I think he knew it from the first ; you know he searched through all my things the day the money was missed, drawers, trunks, everything !"

" Yet he found nothing ?"

" No ; he found nothing !"

Once more an agonizing pause, when the rest might bring some proof of her words.

" But the notes ; what became of them, Alice ?"

" Listen ; I destroyed them."

" Destroyed them ?"

" Not quite ; I was alone. I thought at first if I could get them back ! But I was too frightened to plan anything. I had slipped them in my shoe when Guy first came in so wildly that day, and when he was gone there was neither

fire nor candle; but I lit a match, and burnt the notes all but a bit at the end. I heard Guy speak to you on the stairs; I heard you coming. I blew out the flame, I was so afraid."

"But the rest of the notes, Alice?"

"I pushed them in behind the chimney-glass, and threw myself on the sofa. They are there now, I dare say, unless Mrs. Wilding has moved the glass. But no doubt she hasn't; she never cared to clean much, you know! I am better now, dear!" and she heaved a deep sigh. "When I bid poor Guy goodbye, he told me he knew I had done it; but he said he forgave me. He would never tell, and would bear my punishment for me, if I would promise to be a good woman. And you know, Rachel, I have tried to be good! havn't I tried hard?"

"I believe you have, poor Alice! Now sleep, dear, if you can. If the one you wronged so deeply forgave so truly, so must we all!"

"I am sleepy now," said she wearily, "I wish I could dream of Guy!"

I laid her back on her pillow, and drew the curtain, while I kept one eye fixed on Mr. Fairman's movements. He glided from the room with the paper in his hand ; I followed.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Fairman?" and I looked hard at him.

"I am going first to ask counsel of God, and then—"

"And then you will return, and pray with and comfort the poor trembling sinner. Meanwhile you will let me have this paper in charge!" and as I spoke I took the sheet from his hand,

"Miss Arden, I am a magistrate as well as a ~~energymen~~!"

"True; but you are not acting like yourself to-day. Some one has urged you on."

"Mr. Rolfe has besought me to learn the truth."

"Well, now you know it; but, Mr. Fairman, the principal person interested has a right to be consulted—has he not?"

"As a magistrate, I should say 'No'—not where justice is concerned."

"But as Christ's minister?"

"I would do as I would be done by."

"You would; and you would show mercy, hoping to receive it. Now, dear Mr. Fairman, I hold this paper for the present; you will use your influence, and preach patience to Mr. Rolfe. Let us wait awhile, and not disturb the trembling soul upon whom God's hand is laid already."

Alice was calmer and quieter than she had been for years. She talked a little of her child, a good deal of Guy, and now and then of her heartless brother; but it was all childlike talk—very much as if she had returned to her girlish days. I know that her repentance was deep and sincere; had she lived she would have been a better woman, as far as her weak character permitted. As it was, I think she fancied confession was atonement.

Sometimes she spoke hopefully of living to see Guy once more, and eagerly seconded every effort

made for her recovery. Despite every human attempt at cure, she gradually sank ; and, alas ! as man lives, so, for the most part, he dies !

While we—that is, Guy's father, Mr. Fairman, the good doctor, and I—stood round her death-bed, forgetful of her errors, only in that last moment alive to the tenderest compassion for her sufferings and her early end, Alice's eyes were fixed on the pattern of my dress ; nearly her last murmured words were,—

“One like that when I'm well !” Then the solemn truth returned to her mind, and feebly drawing me down to her, she whispered, “Rachel, never leave poor Guy !”

Her eyes closed ; and nothing was left but a fair childlike face, from which sin and sorrow were wiped out !

CHAPTER XXIX.

GUY'S RETURN.

WHEN the earth had returned to the earth, we seemed to stand still and look at each other—the old father and I. A solemn awe was upon his spirit as well as mine, things of this world were less to us than before, and we talked quietly enough with Mr. Fairman and the doctor, who had been admitted to our counsels ; the result of the discussion was, that Dr. B— hired Mrs. Wilding's lodgings for a month, and went backwards and forwards there several times with his assistant, to see that the rooms were in nice order. On one of these occasions the mistress of the house found, to her great consternation, that by

some strange accident the looking-glass was cracked, the frame partly broken. It is on record that the doctor willingly paid the value of the glass, and the month's rent of the apartment, to which after all no tenant came. Soon after this, we sent to beg that Messrs. Pincher & Screw would call upon us ; they came to my house, and there sat round the table five men in eager discussion, before whom I laid the pencilled notes Mr. Fairman had taken from poor Alice's dying lips ; then the doctor produced and spread before them two little bits of crumpled paper, dirty and stained, but still showing the peculiar watermark of bank notes. All the five men wore spectacles, not one was under sixty, some were much more, but the eagerness of youth was in every face, and a triumphant light on the father's, as he exclaimed to the bankers, "I told you, gentlemen, my son was incapable of a dishonourable action !"

"And I told you, gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Screw, with at least equal exultation, "that while

the numbers are still legible, notes are still redeemable!"

"Hang the notes!" said the doctor; "and now, what is the first step to take?"

I looked at Mr. Rolfe beseechingly, he turned his face away. I laid my hand on his arm and whispered a few entreating words; then he turned and said with effort, "Gentlemen, it is my earnest request that this matter rests perfectly quiet till my son arrives, he must be here in a few months; you will, I presume, grant this?"

"Assuredly," said the partners; while Mr. Screw caressed the fragments of the notes.

"We forgive and forget, don't we, Mr. Rolfe?" said Mr. Pincher, extending his hand to Guy's father.

"We forgive, certainly," he replied, "may God help us to forget! Ah! who can give back to my boy his youth, his happiness? Who can wipe out the misery of these long years?"

"God can," I whispered low.

"Amen!" responded Mr. Fairman, while the

father bowed his head upon his hands and sobbed,
“ My boy ! my boy !”

The conference of that day was kept an absolute secret ; Warford might have watched and wondered why those old men met together ; but curiosity was never satisfied. It is a strange coincidence, that all but Mr. Rolfe were unmarried men, and his wife was very unlikely to ask for, or obtain his confidence, for since the first misfortunes fell upon her husband and son, she had never returned to Warford, and only within the last few years had renewed any correspondence with the first. Seven months from the death of Alice, ten from the wedding of her child had expired. Both events had been cautiously imparted to Guy, not by me, but by his father, but no acknowledgment of the letters had arrived. What were we to think ? Had they never reached their destination ? Was he ill, or even dead, unknowing that his innocence was acknowledged ? The deep calm that had succeeded the long fearful storm, began once more to be troubled.

Early spring had come among us suddenly, and the violets and primroses were opening fast into life in my garden. It was already warm and I was enabled to sit working, or reading in the summer-house, though often the work fell from my hands, and my eyes followed the words without taking in much meaning from them.

I was reading Wordsworth, when a slight rustling among the garden trees made me look up, and there in the sunshine, stood my old childhood's playmate, with a sort of eager, yet hesitating, look. "Guy! Guy!" I cried; perhaps a few foolish words were added, but I don't know, for my head swam, my eyes closed, and, had he not caught me, I should have fallen.

I forgot everything that followed for that day and for many days after, till I woke up from strange illness, to find that Guy's return was no fever-dream as I feared, but a happy reality!

CHAPTER XXX.

MADAME SERAPHINE AND THE JUNIOR PARTNER.

IT was the first serious illness that I had ever had in life, and I awoke as if in a new existence; awoke to find an old, yet familiar face hanging over me, large and red, but with kind eyes and pleasant smiles. Where had I seen it before? She was a motherly-looking woman; and I, weak as a child, was strangely comforted and moved to tears, when she stooped down and kissed me. "Don't you know me?" No, I did not; but I rubbed my thin hand on my forehead, and strove hard to unravel the tangled skein of thought. "Don't you know me, Madame Seraphine?" Know her! It all rushed back

with a single wave of memory's tide. I don't know whether my head still wandered, but my first words to Madame Seraphine astonished myself, "Ah! you have not yet been trampled to death?"

"No, my dear, I know how to hold my own; I'm not like many poor, weak women, led away by my feelings. You know the two men you used to see in my apartments?"

"Yes, I remember, Sykes, and—and—".

"Well, both turned out badly; one embezzled from a Savings Bank, and ran away; the other—you know what attention they both paid me?"

"Yes."

"Would you believe it, Sykes was a married man after all! he was unmasked, and I shook off the dust from my feet on him! But, I forgot, I was told not to let you say a word!"

"Only one, dear Madame Seraphine—How came you here? who has nursed me? have I been long ill?"

"How came I here? By the train to be sure.

I wanted change of air; all of a sudden I took it into my head to hunt you up, came down to find you very ill, and insisted on nursing you, that's all; your illness has lasted some weeks. The old gentleman wanted to shut me out and to shut you in, but I am not one to yield to man's tyranny, and to have my rights stamped out of me. By-the-bye, the junior partner is a very nice man."

"The junior partner?"

"Yes, Mr. Guy Rolfe, of the bank, you know; I have opened an account with Messrs. Screw, Pincher, and Rolfe."

"Please ask Mr. Rolfe to come to me. Is he in the house?"

"I think he is outside your door, where he often sits when I won't let him in; it is a bad precedent to let a man have his own way too often; if one does, he expects it always."

The old man was immediately bending over me. "Well, my dear child?"

“Child, Sir! Do you know how old I am?”

“No, and I don’t want to know; your face does not tell it, nor your feelings; and now, you know, Rachie, we are all going to begin life again, starting from—yes, from when you two children were catching butterflies together in the fields!”

I could not help it, I raised myself a little from my pillow, and threw my arms round the old man’s neck, crying like a child from very weakness, while I involuntarily uttered, “I have no one left but you.”

“Well, didn’t I adopt you long ago? And presently, dear, if God will, the adoption will be sealed! Now, the doctor says you must be kept quiet, so we will say no more.”

“Only one thing, suspense is worse than agitation, what has been done?”

“What? a great work; Guy is junior partner in the bank; the money emolument’s little; but the name, the position bring salvation! Old Screw offered it himself, he called it reparation.

Rachie, I could have bent my old knees to bless that man ! But you grow faint!"

" No, no ; joy does not kill. What else ?"

" As regards the past, nothing is done. Nothing would make Guy consent to an investigation which he said would desecrate a grave ! It seemed hard to give in, to leave things as they were, to shield her, but——"

" It was right, father, God will think it right."

" Well, I suppose so, and we should try to forget. Besides, this offer from Screw, coming directly after Guy's noble resolution, seems to put all right. I suppose you are not able to see Guy to-day, my dear ?"

" Not to-day !" Indeed I could bear no more.

" He is in lodgings close at hand, but he is here two or three times a day."

" And you ?"

" I my dear, am your head nurse whatever your friend Madame Seraphine may say, your domestic chaplain, almoner,—what you will ! I knew you would get well, with God's blessing, and every-

thing has been done throughout your illness, as I knew you would have it. Your old men and women have had their tea and sugar, your school children their sugar-plums and penny books, even the sparrows in the garden, their crumbs."

"Oh Mr. Rolfe!"

"What you are thinking of, my dear?"

"Thinking how good God is! thinking how I love Him!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RIVER'S BANK.

SINCE my mother went to her grave, I had never known any calm happiness till now. I dreaded anything that might break the spell of peace. Still weak from illness, I had a good excuse for seeing no one but my nurses, and keeping in my own special precincts. I had not yet seen Guy, I dreaded a visit from him, as something for which my strength would fail. Sometimes I caught a distant glimpse of him walking in my garden, or tending the flowers. Despite all he had gone through, he looked to me younger than he had seemed at our last farewell: his old,

luxuriant, curly hair had come back again, he walked more erectly and with more elasticity. Sometimes he glanced up at my window anxiously, and I knew his thoughts were with me.

At length I was pronounced well enough to go out; I was to be driven for an hour daily, which drive might extend to two hours, if my strength permitted.

An open carriage was at the door, Mr. Rolfe brought me down stairs, Guy was already in the driver's seat—he leapt out and handed me in, in silence—Mr. Rolfe waved his hand and we set off.

I think Guy was as pale and agitated as I was; his eyes were full of tears. I fancied that, like me, he dreaded words about the past; and to talk it all over would have been nearly as bad as to live it again.

We drove on in almost absolute silence, only now and then broken by Guy's asking how I felt? was I comfortable? did the cushions behind me want shaking? Presently I grew accustomed to

the thing, and felt nothing, but quiet contentment; then I fell asleep, leaning back, and only woke at the door, and was almost lifted out and into the house by Guy.

I heard Mr. Rolfe whisper, "Well, Guy?" And he answered "We have not talked at all." Then he turned to me "Shall I come and drive you to-morrow, dear?"

"Yes please, Guy." And then I turned away to the wall, and they thought I was asleep again. Weakness of body brings weakness of mind! I had such a foolish wish, that I could dream my youth over again, sleeping or waking, and forget all that had passed between then and now! It was very great happiness to have Guy back again beside me, as in old times, with nothing to come between us; and it was very sweet to receive so much kindness, so many gentle cares, and to rest awhile from all thought and action.

Several days Guy drove me out that way, and I grew stronger. I was almost sorry that I did, for fear of any change. Then I was ordered to

walk a little; to drive out of the town, take as much exercise as I could bear, without fatigue, and drive home.

"Do you care which way we go, Rachel?"

"No, Guy, you choose."

"But you never get your own way, dear."

"I don't care for it, I like some one to decide things for me, especially now I am not strong."

Guy said no more, but he drove on through the most familiar of our old haunts; on, nearly to the river-bank. Then he stopped, got out, and gave the horse's head to a boy.

"Now, Rachel! there, slowly, gently, lean on me. Is this the place?"

"Yes."

I knew what he meant, we were near the spot where the dog had saved him.

"I can't walk far, Guy!"

"No, Rachie, you shan't; you shall sit awhile on the grass, but we won't tell the doctor."

We walked on a little way, till we came to a

bit of rising ground, covered with turf, and sat down. Long we two kept silence, the only sound was from the branches waving and the river murmuring by.

“Was it just here, dear?”

“Yes, here!”

“One of the few things in the past one would not willingly forget.”

Then he shaded his face with his hands, and began—

“Rachel, shall you mind my asking you a question?”

“It depends on what the question is, Guy!”

“I acknowledge that I ask with hesitation.”

“Then why ask it at all, brother Guy?”

“Why indeed! why stir dead ashes. Are you tired? Do you wish to go home?”

“No, I would rather stay here.”

“For how long?”

“Oh, for as long as you have patience to wait for me!”

"That would be a long while, dear, too long,
the doctor would say!"

"Guy!"

"Yes, dear!"

"Does that question refer to the past?"

"Yes."

"To yourself?"

"Not directly."

"Ask me then, I will try to answer."

"And you will not be angry?"

"I never feel anger now; I have outlived young
follies!"

"Then tell me, can you bear to speak of
Elmore?"

"Certainly; why not?"

"Had your illness anything to do with the
sacrifice you made for little Alice's happiness?"

"I made no sacrifice, so it could have nothing
to do with my illness."

"No sacrifice?"

"No, my feelings were not concerned."

"My dear father told me so ; still I wanted to hear it from yourself."

"But are you satisfied, Guy? I mean with what I have done?"

"If I were not, I should be the most graceless wretch alive! I can't talk, dear—I mean I can't say what I would, but I think you will understand it all some day!"

As he spoke he took my hand in his.

"Poor little hand! how thin it is! See, Rachie, here is a little ring of Australian gold I have brought you, but it proves too big!"

He slipped it on the third finger of my right hand—it was a wedding ring. Never did fear strike on a mortal heart more than it did on mine at that minute. I grew deadly pale, and trembled like a leaf.

"I want you to keep it on that finger till May Day, dear, and then—if you can love me a little, let me put it on, in its right place!"

"Oh, Guy!"

"Can't you love me a little, Rachie?"

“ It isn’t that, but—”

“ Well, dear ?”

“ I don’t know, I can’t say it !”

“ You mean, is my heart worth having ?”

“ No, no, not that.”

“ What then ?”

“ Can it be all true, Guy ? Can you love me, with no youth, with my homely face !”

“ Rachel, it is the fairest face in the world to me, and the love I have for you, is the only worthy one my heart has ever known ! Love me and I renew my youth—leave me and life is over !”

I could not speak for a minute ; that infinite happiness was too much to bear. I could but clasp my hands together, and bow my head upon my knees.

“ Rachel, you don’t know how you are paining me, or womanly tenderness would make you answer me !”

“ What shall I say, Guy ?”

“ Just the truth from your own frank heart ?”

“Then Guy—”

“My darling?”

“I have loved you all my life long, except while it was sin to love you!”

I don't know how Guy took my words, I only know that my strength gave way, and that he carried me in his strong arms to the carriage, and drove me quickly home, and watched and tended me as if he were a mother, and I a sick child. I often thought it was all a happy dream, and then I felt the plain gold ring to be sure it was true. I was the happiest woman alive, and yet—and yet I believe, if I knew my own heart, I would rather have been again the Virginia to this Paul, than his wife!

* * * * *

POSTSCRIPT.

We were married on a May day. God has given me a child, and Guy a son. He sits on my knees at the moment I write, and blesses my

sight with a likeness of his noble father. Our father cleaves to us, and shares our happiness.

Mrs. Rolfe has graciously returned to her home and duty, having read a paragraph that went the round of all the papers, relating the wonderful discovery of the lost notes, which had led to such unfortunate and painful results ; she read also that her son was a partner in the bank which he was once, through a fatal error, accused of robbing.

Madame Seraphine has settled near us, and has surprised us all by a very late marriage with a blind man. His infirmity makes him rather hasty, but she is a model wife, and assures me that he conducts himself perfectly well "for a man, my dear."

Of Elmore and Alice we have good news ; they say we shall see them again some day.

Mr. Vincent has never re-appeared in Warford.

Mrs. Belton dropt out of our lives years back, she has since become paralysed, and now always

sends for me when she is ill or sad, to help her bear her life's burden.

Messrs. Screw and Pincher are about to retire, and my Guy, my noble Guy, will then be the head of the firm. Ah ! life will not be long enough for our love ! but then—then we shall have eternity !

THE END.

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